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PAUL S. RUSSELL

ST. EPHRAEM THE SYRIAN
AND
ST. GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN
CONFRONT THE ARIANS.



ST. EPHRAEM ECUMENICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE [SEERI]

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**St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI)
Baker Hill, Kottayam - 686 001
Kerala, India
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PREFACE

The study of the early Church and of the development of Christian thought has been prey to all the foibles and weaknesses of the people who have undertaken it. The reconstruction of the Arian Controversy and the manner of the development of doctrine in the Church in the course of this controversy have been areas particularly susceptible to the deeply-held feelings of scholars. Whether the Arians are viewed as misunderstood seekers of Truth or as malevolent destroyers of the Church's golden age, whether the various cultural groups comprising the ancient Church have been seen as welded into a perfect unity of peace, love and pure doctrine or have been seen as swallowed up one-by-one by the on-rushing advance of a subtile theology more Hellenic than Christian, the portrait of the past is likely to be at least partly rooted in the mind of the author. The present project of comparing the best known work of Gregory Nazianzus with famous works of Ephraem the Syrian was begun with the idea that, whatever it would discover, such a study might provide in miniature a glimpse of the similarity and difference of thought on a well-defined subject between two theological authors who could fairly be called fundamental to their respective religious traditions.

This study aims at examining the similarities and differences between two of the greatest and most influential authors of the early Church: Ephraem the Syrian and Gregory of Nazianzus. Each of these two men, in his own sphere and in the ecclesiastical history of his own cultural milieu, produced works that have been treated as classical. The beauty of each writer's use of language and the content of each man's theological doctrine have had enormous impact on the subsequent development of their churches' expressions of Christian doctrine.

This study offers a number of different areas in which it can hope to shed light on the development of thought in the early Church. Among these are: the contrast of the greatest

writer of early Christian Syriac with an eminent Greek contemporary (and through them of their nascent traditions), the investigation of the similarities and differences in the arguments offered against the Arians by an influential Syrian Nicene Christian and one of the most outspoken Greek defenders of that council and an examination of the similarities and differences in the method of argumentation displayed in their very different media of expression. This last is particularly interesting as it has become common to view the theology of the Syrian Church as being different in content from that of the western Church. Does this supposed difference hold up in this case when the details of the two arguments are examined or does the rhetorical prose of Gregory tend toward the same points and means of expression as Ephraem's metrical homelies and hymns?

Until the recent publication of the critical editions of the writings of Ephraem by Dom Edmund Beck, OSB, scholars were not able to examine Ephraem's works with complete confidence in the validity of points they might seek to draw from textual details. Now that barrier has been surmounted, it seemed opportune to take advantage of our possession of these works in such good textual editions, to make the comparison.

Why would one choose these particular works, when the two authors under study produced such large bodies of surviving texts? I have chosen these two sets of texts for the following reasons: they are written as contributions to the same debate of Arian versus Nicene and so can be considered to have something inherently in common with each other, they were produced quite close to each other in time (Gregory's orations being more exactly and reliably dated than Ephraem's contributions) and they have been treated as special works by later Christians in their respective language groups. The first of these facts makes comparing these works a reasonable project rather than a self-serving choice that might be taken to skew their natural appearances. The second serves to give confidence that there was not time for the earlier writings (those of Ephraem, in this case) to be made known to the other author, thereby voiding the value of the study. The third renders the results of the study of wider-ranging interest than it might be otherwise, since it can be seen to provide a comparison of a particular stage of

these two theological traditions, at least in this very circumscribed subject area.

A word must be said about the justification for embarking on such a large project of comparative study when it involves works written in isolation from each other. What value is there in placing such writings side-by-side? I believe the value is found exactly in this unawareness of each other's contributions to the Christological argument. Because these works were written as contributions on the same side of the same argument, yet without either author being aware of the other's work, it is justifiable, even desirable, to compare them in order to increase our knowledge of the entire scope of the Arian Controversy within the two different language communities. By viewing what these two astute theological writers thought to be the most central elements of the quarrel and discovering how they chose to counter their opponents' most telling points we will arrive at a better understanding of how these two authors thought of this most important theological debate of their time. Through this we will also be able to gain a better sense of what underlying assumptions these writers passed on to those following after them in their own ecclesiastical traditions, which should promise some useful insights for those wishing to understand the development of Christian thought in both the Greek and Syriac speaking worlds.

One of the central assumptions of much modern scholarship on the ancient Syriac speaking Church has taken for granted that it had characteristics that differed from the rest of the early Church in very fundamental ways. This has often been expressed through ideas of the Syrian Church as a survival of the true and original Semitic Church, protected by its geographical location and linguistic separation from the contamination of the influence of the imperial Greek culture. Bruns¹ provides a contemporaneous example of this tendency. I am unable to speak with authority about the impression presented by repeated reading of the whole of the surviving corpus of Ephraem's works. The repeated reading of the works under examination in this study does not support

1. Bruns (1990) esp. pp. 52 and ff.

this conclusion. To my ear, Ephraem seems engaged in a theological struggle of the utmost importance that requires all his wit and effort. He gives no hint of thinking he is battling against a foe entering his cultural world from without. His concern seems to be to guard his faith rather than his culture. Is Bruns' manner of reading Ephraem's works any more appropriate than that of for example, R. P. C. Hanson, who does not refer to them at all in his monumental work on the Arian Controversy? Is Ephraem operating in a separate world with a separate agenda than the other Christian authors of his time? I do not think so. This study will endeavor to show that Ephraem engages in the Arian debate as a Nicene Christian wishing to defend what he believes to be the true faith. The question of what language his opponents may be speaking, or, indeed, his allies, does not enter into the matter. If the picture presented in these pages is convincing, Ephraem may begin to be allowed out of his ethnic ghetto to take his place beside the other outstanding thinkers and defenders of the Nicene side of the great Arian debate. He has been too long in the shadows.

If this work has been done fairly and conscientiously it will provide solid evidence of how the work of these two writers might be viewed in the light of a common task: countering the spread of Arianism. The reconstruction of the development of christological and theological doctrine, even after the recent *magnum opus* of R. P. C. Hanson, is a large project not yet completed. How can scholars of the early Church think themselves to have a clear grasp of the development and form of this crucial argument over the central thread in Christian teaching when the voice most prominent in the effort to win the entire Syriac speaking community to the support of Nicea is never heard at all in our own reconstructions of the period? The Nicene Controversy was waged with great energy and grim intensity on all sides because of its location at the heart of the Christian proclamation. In order for it to be appreciated justly it must be seen whole; the reintroduction of the work of Ephraem into this swirl of argument is a necessary step in this process. It is the contention of the author of this study that our view of the development of christological doctrine cannot ever hope to be even fairly complete until we at least learn to heed all the different voices the past can offer us. The shape of the edifice in which this study might form a brick is not

certainly known, but if the discerning of its outline is helped yet along even a little by this project it will have been time well spent.

Notes on Textual Details

I have referred to works cited in the notes by the author's name followed by the date of publication as indicated in the bibliography.

The translations offered are my own, with the following exceptions: I have used Nock's translation of Sallustius from his edition of *Concerning the Gods and the Universe*, I have used Vaggione's translation of Eunomius from his edition of the surviving works, and I have used Dodds' translation of Proclus published in his edition of that work. For the works I have translated myself, I have always looked at the translations contained in the works cited in the Bibliography, but I have chosen my own idea of the best rendering for an English translation.

I have cited Gregory's *Theological Orations* by the number of the oration, followed by the section from Gallay's text and, occasionally, the line number of the text, which refers to the line of the text as it is printed in Gallay's edition. (e. g. 27. 1. 1) I have cited Ephraem's sermons *On the Faith* from E. Beck's edition by S., followed by the sermon number and the line number. Ephraem's hymns *On the Faith* have been cited from E. Beck's edition by the number of the hymn, followed by the stanza number and then the line numbers, if less than a full stanza is meant.

I have in all cases read the text of Gregory's *Theological Orations* printed by Gallay in his *Sources Chretiennes* edition, with the exception of some obvious typographical errors, which I have corrected. I have always cited Beck's preferred text, which means that I have sometimes read his preferred footnotes in lieu of his base text.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Arian Controversy, because of its triggering of creeds and councils and because of the christological nature of its subject matter, can fairly be called the central Christian argument. If understood as a quarrel over the correct view of Christ, it can be said to have never ceased. Consideration of the content of the arguments involved and of their influence through time has been an important means for theologians to understand their own work and their own context, especially in the last 150 years. After J. H. Newman's volume¹ and H. M. Gwatkin's work at the turn of the century² there was a lull in scholarly engagement with the Arian Controversy. In the decades since the Second World War, however, as theologians from many traditions have felt constrained by the same boundaries which were erected to counter the writings of the non-Nicene participants in the Arian Controversy, there has been a growing realization that the fourth century holds more than a place of merely historical not in the pageant of Christian thought. Theologians of all stripes have found themselves turning to the past again to defend their ideas under other writers' names. The titles of the works "In Defence of Arius" by Maurice Wiles³ and the *Early Arianism A Doctrine of Salvation*, of Gregg and Groh⁴, are indications that some scholars wish not to reconstruct and understand the debate but also to enter into it themselves. The timeliness of the topic addressed by the works under examination in this study and their importance within their own traditions give a double utility, both contemporary and historical, to the task to which this paper is dedicated.

1. Newman (1919)

2. Gwatkin (1882) followed by his *The Arian Controversy* in 1908

3. Wiles (1976) pp. 28-37

4. Gregg (1981)

Reconstruction of the sequence of the controversy and correct placement of the participants in the melee is exceedingly difficult to manage. It is necessary for the formation of a true picture of the period, however. Ephraem's sermons and hymns *On the Faith* and Gregory's *Theological Orations* are fortunate exceptions to this general uncertainty. Murray⁵ places the composition of the sermons in Nisibis, therefore before 363, and that of the hymns in Edessa, so between 363 and Ephraem's death in

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5. Murray (1977) p. 30. His reasons for this are that he sees in the sermons a reflection of "the Persian danger and Jewish proselytism", while of the hymns he says: "These last years were darkened by the advent of Arianism, which threw the Church in Osroene into a turmoil of dissension, described by Ephraem with vividness and acute anguish in the *HFid.*" Murray seems to assume that Arianism was not present, or not as notable to Ephraem, in Nisibis and that these two collections, the sermons and hymns, were each produced as a coherent body of work. I am not certain that either of these things is really known.

de Halleux (1974), p. 62, is pessimistic about our ever gaining real knowledge of, or access to, the original collection of Ephraem's works. This means that we cannot hold with certainty that the collections we see in the earliest surviving manuscripts existed *as collections* earlier than that particular manuscript. Do we have any particular reason to assume that these collections were Ephraem's own product rather than the work of later admirers? I can think of none. Whence, then, comes our confidence that the writings contained in these collections stem from the same time or were meant as a coherent body? Beck divides the sermons and hymns temporally because he regards the hymn's use of the Holy Spirit in the arguments against the Arians as evidence of a later date for them and so as evidence of their being likely to be the product of Ephraem's Edessan period. He also finds a reference to the Apollinarian Controversy at H. 52.3 ff., Beck (1967) p. I, and notes, (1953) p. 111, that the sermons do not argue against Arianism as exclusively [or in as organized a manner as the hymns. The logic of this position requires that Ephraem's Trinitarian thought progress along with his move to Edessa or that he be exposed there to new and greater theological forces that would cause him to reassess his earlier position. It also requires that the collection be considered as the product of one particular time, or else the mention of the Apollinarian Controversy would be an indication of the date of only that particular hymn. I am not certain that either of these requirements has been met, reluctant as I am to cavil at Dom Beck's conclusions. These matters should not be considered closed, as Murray seems to do. Bruns (1990), p. 23, also considers it certain that the sermons [stem from the Nisibene period of Ephraem's life and the hymns form the Edessan; my caution still applies.

June of 373.⁶ *The Theological Orations* of Gregory Nazianzus are even more exactly datable to his time in Constantinople at the church of the Anastasia.⁷ Gallay puts their delivery between July and November 380.⁸ Thus the opinions of the best scholars would have the bulk of the works under examination being composed within a span of 17 years, which, for our purposes, makes them virtually contemporaneous. When we put the teachings contained in these two sets of writings side by side, we are looking at two different Nicene viewpoints, produced in the course of the same discussion, yet springing from very different milieux.⁹ The matter of how different these two writers were in background and education is thus a matter of great interest at the start of the project.

Gregory's life is much better known than Ephraem's, mostly through his own works, particularly his autobiographical poetry. Gregory's education, of paramount importance when considering

6. This means that the bulk of Ephraem's work we will examine comes from the part of Ephraem's life closer to Gregory's composition of the orations. If Beck's opinions on the dating of these collections is correct, the spread of time between Ephraem's production of these works tend, to my mind, to make them representative of the considered thought of his mind. If they are the collected products of his whole career, on the other hand, they would be an even better indication of the basic positions in Ephraem's thought.
7. *De Vita Sua* II. 583-606 in Gregory (1987)
8. Gallay (1978) Intro. p 14
9. The works selected for this study are not the only ones by these authors that treat with the Arian Controversy or offer replies to the Arians. They are, however, perhaps the repository of the greatest concentration of this sort of material. Gregory's *Theological Orations* occupy a special place in the Greek theological tradition, indeed in the intellectual tradition of the whole Church, and can be taken as representative of the best of what would become the orthodoxy of the Greek church. Ephraem's place in the Syrian Church is one of unparalleled eminence. His sermons and hymns should be read as a normative force in the Syrian tradition and as representative of the greatest creative theological mind it produced, indeed of one of the greatest writers the entire Church has produced. The eminent place these works occupy in their traditions, as well as their particular content, add to their fittingness for this sort of comparison. They have been chosen in the hope that they might serve to provide a comparison in microcosm of these two prolific authors and, through them, of the different theological streams they serve so well to represent.

the content of the literary works he produced, was a very long process lasting until almost his thirtieth birthday. Hanson manages to describe it in only one sentence:¹⁰

“Gregory received his elementary education in Nazianzus, his secondary education in Cappadocian Caesarea; he started the third stage of his education by studying oratory under the rhetor Thespasius in Palestinian Caesarea (when Akakius was bishop and Euzoius one of his fellow-pupils), and then spent a short time in Alexandria, and next (c. 350) went to Athens where he spent nearly ten years studying mainly rhetoric but also some philosophy under the pagan Himerius and the Christian Proharesius...”

Points to be noticed particularly are his study, albeit brief, at two centers associated with early formal Christian education: Caesarea in Palestine and Alexandria, as well as the long period spent at the center of Greek classical culture. Gregory enjoyed the best, most traditional education a gentleman of his time could acquire, as well as an advanced Christian education at Caesarea and Alexandria. He represents the academic pinnacle of both aspects of education of the late Empire,¹¹ though always sure in his mind of the relative worth of the two:¹²

“Allowing anything to take precedence over my Christian studies never entered my mind.”

10. Hanson (1988) p. 701

11. Of the state of formal Christian education within the Empire at this time, Marrou (1956) says, p. 328: “But this Christian culture, it should be noted, though it was helped by this remarkable burst of literature and oratory, had no recognized education underlying it. There were no theological colleges. The only instruction that the faithful received was by way of the simple catechism and preaching. The clergy did not go to college; they learned their theology through personal contact with the bishop and the older priests, whom they often joined when they were quite young children, as lectors.” Thus it is unusual that Gregory spent time in two centers of Christian learning as well as in Athens. This breadth of exposure made possible contact with people learned in Christian tradition from a variety of points of view. A well-trained, inquisitive mind like Gregory’s would surely make use of these opportunities. It is impossible to say just what this Christian part of his studies would have included. We stay on solid ground if we consider Gregory’s education as the product of his time in the above-mentioned string of pagan establishments.

12. Gregory (1987) *De Vita Sua* I, 120

Implicit in this comment is Gregory's conviction that the traditional pagan education could interfere with one's Christian faith. Gregory was well aware of the difficulty inherent for a Christian in his desire for learning and cultivation. Raised within the spread of Hellenistic civilization left behind by Alexander and his successors and coming to maturity at the center of the dominant Greek culture, Gregory represents well the central elements of the cultivated Greek Christian intellectual tradition he came to typify. He is representative of this cast of mind in his reply to the Arian challenge.

Ephraem's upbringing is much less well known, as is his education. "He was born at or near Nisbis, probably about 306 and of Christian parents...".¹³ Little more than this can be said with confidence.¹⁴ We know nothing of his education, though the breadth and variety of his literary output suggests that it included instruction in the Scripture as well as literary studies of some sort.¹⁵ Neusner¹⁶ says that there is evidence of an established academy teaching exegesis to Jews in Nisbis even before the Bar Kokhba revolt and evidence that this existed after that as well.

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13. Murray (1977) p. 30 Sozomen (1983) III.16 attaches him to Nisbis. The traditional life of St. Ephraem, reprinted in Brockelmann (1981) p.23 and ff. of the *Chrestomathy*, portrays Ephraem as the son of pagan parents with his father a maker of idols, no less! This is best understood as an attempt to emphasize the sanctity of Ephraem and his independence from his background. It is no more to be believed than is his presence at Nicea, also related in the *Life*. Beck, (Dic.) col. 788, grants importance to the influence of Jacob the bishop of Nisibis) in Ephraem's formation. This agrees with Marrou's picture of Christian instruction at the early period and is more likely *prima facie* than the more sensational picture of the traditional *Life*. Since Ephraem's life was spent working in close contact with the bishop in liturgical and educational endeavors (see Griffith (unpubl.) p. 17), it is reasonable to find an ecclesiastical connection early in life rather than an early career in the midst of paganism. Griffith (unpubl.) refers to Ephraem's words as proof of a childhood spent in contact with Christianity: he cites E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate* (CSCO, vol. 223; Louvain, 1962), XXXVII, 10, p. 135).
 14. See Griffith (unpubl.) p. 16ff. for a brief account of what we can hold with confidence as true of Ephraem's life.
 15. The only school at Nisbis for Christian instruction of which we know was the offshoot of the school of Edessa and so a by-product of the Nestorian troubles. There is no evidence of a similar institution in existence at Ephraem's time. *Dictionnaire d'Archeologie Chretienne et de Liturgie* col. 1377 ff.
 16. Neusner (1984) p. 159

It is hard to imagine Ephraem as a student at a Jewish exegetical school, but its presence may have sparked some Christian counter-establishment which has left no record. At least we can assume that the Christians of Nisbis were aware of the existence of formal exegetical instruction, since Murray envisions very close ties between the Syrian Christians and the Jews.¹⁷ The simplest assumption seems to be that bishop Jacob provided some sort of schooling for the children of the faithful as a means of keeping them loyal and to produce suitable teachers and preachers for the Church. Ephraem would have profited from the instruction and have progressed to be an instructor himself, which would explain the existence of his prose works and commentaries suitable for student use, while his musical and lyrical talents would be siezed upon by the bishop and turned to the service of the community's worship. We have evidence that Ephraem led a life dedicated to God in a formal way and that he considered himself to be one of the spepherds of the flock.¹⁸ This places him among the hierarchy rather than the laity, though there is no exact modern equivalent in the formal hierarchy of the Church in the West for the role he played and the life he led.

It is difficult to arrive at a very precise profile for the Nicene community to which Ephraem belonged. The Syrian Church as a whole seems to have felt that it stood on its own in an hostile environment, whatever its actual size may have been.¹⁹ Indeed there are some indications that, within this local congregation of the Church, the Nicene element was a small and relatively weak part of the whole.²⁰ Seen against this backdrop, the vigor and comprehensiveness of Ephraem's arguments against his opponents are even more impressive. Rather than fading away in the face of a larger and better-connected adversary, the Arians enjoying imperial favour during most of his adult life, Ephraem lashes out boldly.

17. Murray (1982) p. 5

18. Griffith (unpubl.) pp. 16-20

19. Murray (1982) p. 6

20. Duval (1901) p. 402 Gregory also preached the sermons under study in a city largely controlled by those hostile to his theology: Mossay p. 166 and Kopecek (1979) p. 407

The level of Ephraem's acquaintance with Greek thought and language is not known.²¹ Murray grants Ephraem knowledge of the Greek tradition of thought, at least late in his life.²² It would hardly be possible for Ephraem to have *no* acquaintance with Greek culture, but we need not think that he was overwhelmed by it. Brock holds for the continuing coherence of Syrian culture in Ephraem²³ and shows a willingness to grant Ephraem know-

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21. The amount of contact each scholar allows between Ephraem and the Greek world and language is a particularly difficult point, since this is naturally affected by how much evidence he or she sees in Ephraem of an independent Semitic cast of mind. The ramifications of the choice one makes on this point extend throughout the picture of Ephraem's daily life and intellectual frame of reference that each reader must attempt to construct. The most that can be stated with absolute certainty at this point in the development of our knowledge of the ancient Church in Syria is that we do not have the means to come to a dependable judgement on the matter. We must read what hints we have and leave our minds open to the possibility of future adjustment.
 22. Murray (1982) p. 9 also cf. Murrar (1975) p. 13: "It is probably not yet possible, with our present knowledge of early Syriac culture, to assess what familiarity with Greek philosophy could percolate through to a Nisibene who, as far as we know, was neither bilingual nor inclined to seek enlightenment from the Greeks. We may assume that a certain amount of osmosis has affected even Ephraem, but he is certainly no Platonist like Gregory of Nyssa. When Ephraem's language becomes most philosophical, he is probably being forced, however unwillingly, to take up some of the Arian's weapons, though he is always able to maintain his chosen position based on the primacy of symbols and the analogical validity of human language." It is hard to tell from this if Ephraem would be more reluctant to take on some of Greek thought than Murray would be reluctant to allow that Ephraem had done so. Griffith (1991) p. 50, grants the likelihood of Ephraem having knowledge of theological events beyond his own linguistic sphere and puts forward cultural preference as the reason for his individual way of expressing his own opinions. Beck (1993) pp. 35ff. discusses the evidence of Greek philosophical thought in Ephraem, acknowledging Aristotle's *Categories* to have been well enough known to him for Ephraem to have drawn Syriac equivalents to some of its philosophical terms. Morris (1847) note. f, pp. 279-280 goes so far as to say: "It seems, however, (in spite of what some argue from Theodoret H.E. IV. 29.) likely that St. E. knew Greek...." There is clearly a broad range of scholarly opinion on this point.
 23. Brock (1982) p. 17 Note also Brock (1985), p. 118 ff., where he says: "...one needs to recall that, by the fourth century AD, Greek and Semitic cultures had already been interacting in the Middle East for over half a millenium: 'no Syriac writer of Ephraem's time is going to be purely Semitic in character or totally unhellenized; nor, for that matter, will any Greek Christian writer of that time b(e) totally unsemitized. It is simply a matter of degree'".

ledge without requiring subservience of him. This seems to me to be the most likely pattern, because it makes no sense to think that any intellectually lively person, living along a major trade route (which would bring many Greeks and others aware of events in the Greek and Latin speaking parts of the Empire through the city), and devoting himself to the defence of and reflection on Christian doctrine could have lived his life completely isolated from the Church to the West and its culture. Any attempt to present Ephraem as unaffected by or unaware of the pivotal events in the Church of the greater Empire is unreasonable. It does not require that one consider Ephraem a secondary adjunct to the real center of Christian development for one to expect him to be vitally interested in the activities of the great Church. Ephraem's entire adult life was lived at the time of the great upheaval of the Arian Controversy. This must have been of great concern for him and for all the other reflective Christians in Nisbis and Edessa.²⁴ So, this study will attempt to hold in view as it proceeds the picture of a highly educated aristocrat on the Greek model, knowledgable in the sweep of the great classical culture, on the one hand, and of a highly intelligent and creative mind, trained in Christian learning in a Christian environment, on the other.²⁵ These two portraits present our pair of authors.

24. This line of thought throws us back again to the question of the dates of composition of these two collection) of Ephraem's works. Does it really seem likely, as Murray seems to think, that Ephraem's moves west to Edessa resulted in his gaining a new realization of and interest in the arguments of the Arian Controversy? This seems to me to allow to Ephraem too little awareness of the state of the Church throughout the greater part of his life. My own high opinion of the acuteness of mind of the author of these hymns and sermons, and my conviction that life on a major trade route was always somewhat cosmopolitan, lead me to conclude provisionally that Ephraem was aware of the events and arguments of the Arian Controversy throughout his period of composing Christian literature.

25. Brock (1985) p. 118 contrasts the two literary traditions with these words 'Furthermore, it is important not to regard the existence of the two poles of 'Hellenic' and 'Semitic' as implying that the differences between the two approaches is inherently a linguistic or cultural one: the opposition should rather, be seen as lying between a philosophical and analytical approach on the one hand, and on the other an approach that is primarily symbolic and synthetic. ...yet at the same time this same reader will not fail to observe how very close, at a profounder level, Ephraem nevertheless is to his

II

Before a comparison of Gregory's and Ephraem's teachings as evidenced in these anti-Arian writings can be begun, we must gain some picture of their general ideas of theology to serve as background to the more particular arguments we shall study and to help us discern some of their motives in arguing as they do. As this study progresses it will become clearer and clearer that these basic assumptions about theology are central to the entire controversy, at least in Gregory's and Ephraem's opinions. We will begin with Gregory's understanding of theology.

"Our great mystery is in danger of becoming a mere technical enterprise",

Says Gregory at the start of these orations.²⁶ This is an immediate concern for him rather than just a simple piety.

Greek contemporaries. What separates them is, not so much a basically different understanding of the central doctrines of Christianity, but rather their very different mode of presenting these doctrines." [See also Griffith (1991) p. 51 for another expression of this distinction with particular reference to the reading of Scripture.] This different method of presentation is evidenced in the great difference between the genres of writing into which these two bodies of work fall. Gregory's orations are sermons set aside from the course of the service of worship they were meant to accompany. They are Christian rhetorical pieces: reverent in tone and pious in content, they still issue from the mouth of their author with all the tropes and polish of a cultured [late-antique] address. They present a secular form turned to a Christian purpose. MacMullen (1989) makes clear that Gregory's audience would have been overwhelmingly of the wealthy and educated classes and so would expect and demand preaching to suit their taste. The sermons and hymns of Ephraem, on the other hand fall more naturally into the flow of the service as a part of the worship rather than as a respite from it. (This is more particularly true of the hymns than of the sermons, whose exact context is not completely clear: were they recited at length during the service or as a separate event?) Allusive and elliptical, they seek to evoke thought and connections in the minds of their audience as well as to convince by their logic. Their tone is reminiscent of the Psalms and their rather circular progress adds to the feeling of deliberateness they exude. Yet these works, too, can strike quickly when their author wishes and are able to carry all the weight and precision of thought of any proper rhetorical exercise. The different cultural backgrounds have placed different vehicles to hand for these authors to load with their arguments, but neither is inhibited from saying what he wishes.

26. Or. 27. 2. 14-15 It is interesting to note that Theodoret says of Eunomius at

Theology is not a mechanical operation like building a bridge and to treat it so shows a lack of appreciation for its nature. Technical and intellectual aptitude are not the only, or even the most important, qualities of a successful theologian. Just as theology is a study that embraces all of reality from the creator down to the least of his creatures, so is it one that requires the proper application of all elements of the human person. Theology cannot be divorced from the life of piety or the daily behaviour of the practitioner, Gregory believes. So, when Gregory describes²⁷ the connection between what people find acceptable in moral terms in their daily lives and the theological work they produce, he is insisting again that success here, in this greatest of arenas, is measured by different standards and made possible by different sorts of action than is true for investigations or intellectual constructions undertaken in regard to a more physical realm. The carnal lives of the Arians, then, can only issue in carnal theology.²⁸ In a striking application of the story in *Exodus*²⁹ about the meeting of Moses and God on the mount, Gregory describes the various levels of progress in theology by reference to the different people in the story. This is his drawing out of his understanding of the range of success possible in theology and shows clearly his belief that the extent to which it is possible for a person to advance in theology is determined by the moral quality of the life that person has led. A more highly developed technique or more advanced education will be of no avail to someone who

Compendium Haereticorum Fabularum IV. 3 "He declared that theology was technology, and profanely belched forth blasphemies about the Only-Begotten and the all-Holy Spirit." (Harnack (1903), vol. IV p. 7 note 1, quotes this as spoken of Aetius but I read the passage to mean it of Eunomius). The effect of the neo-Arian theological enterprise on the pro-Nicene mind was quite consistent, it seems. Even if the neo-Arians did not themselves call their method "technology", the Nicenes read it and thought of it as such.

27. Or. 27. 6 where he puts forward moral inadequacy as a disqualification for correct theological understanding, saying: "How, do you think, will someone who approves of adulteries and corrupting children receive talk about these things: with what kind of thoughts? Will he not receive them materially, shamefully, ignorantly?" Misdirected actions are a sign of a misdirected mind.
28. Gregory puts forward as fact that his opponents suffered from these various moral failings. I know of no information that would prove that this was correct, though that lack does not disprove his contention.
29. Ch. 19ff.

lives a life of low spiritual quality. The moral level of one's life is the controlling factor in Gregory's view of the equation.

Even if we manage to attain the very highest moral quality in our lives, our theological progress, indeed our ability to hope for success at all, is the fruit of the Incarnation, in Gregory's eyes.³⁰ Gregory describes our ability to approach the divine and gaze on it as being result of the Incarnation because we can take shelter behind the humanity of Christ just as Moses hid in the cleft in the rock to glimpse the hindparts of God as He passed.³¹ As Mason describes it in his note on the passage:³² "The Incarnation gives an assured point from which we may observe and study God, without being overwhelmed by the greatness of the revelation. The glories of the Divine Nature are tempered for us, as it were, by the Human Life which encompasses us as we look out from it to the Divine. By the Incarnation, our field of contemplation is at once restricted and made clear".

Implicit in this understanding of the effects of the Incarnation is a conviction that the Incarnation will have an effect on the meaning and use of Scripture, because it provides us with a heightened ability to see what has been revealed to us in Scripture as a result of our newly increased ability to contemplate the divine. This ability springs from this same hiding behind the humanity of Christ and the resultant near approach to God. It is impossible that Gregory would allow that the Incarnation can aid the theology of the Arians in the same way despite their denial of its fullness or that he would admit that they can receive this more acute awareness of Scripture. If Gregory's opinion of the effect of the Incarnation is correct; it would seem to result in a further weakening of the Arian theological enterprise in comparison to the Nicene, since it introduces a strong aid to contemplation which the Arians do not receive because they do not realize the truth of the Incarnation and so cannot take advantage of it. There are few enough certain helps for the attempts of finite beings to grasp the Infinite; this refusal of one of the most powerful, which is the central point of Arian

30. Or. 28. 3. 6

31. Ex. 33:23

32. Mason (1899) pp. 24-25

teaching, cripples their attempt to make advances in theological understanding, according to Gregory's scheme.

Gregory does believe in the possibility of fruitful efforts in theology but that does not mean that he thinks that this progress will continue until the ultimate goal of the knowledge of God is reached. Indeed, this is one of the areas of the starkest contrast between his basic assumptions and those of the neo-Arians.³³

"In my opinion, expressing [the divine] is impossible, but conceiving it in one's mind is even more impossible."

Conceiving God is more difficult than expressing Him because, while we *do* have some bits of knowledge taken from Scripture we can proclaim with confidence, we cannot fully grasp their meaning. Gregory's emphatic restatement of this principle a few pages later:³⁴

"The divine cannot be grasped by the human mind and cannot even be fully imagined as it really is."

Is aimed specifically against the Arian attempt to grasp the divine nature by the use of logical linguistic investigations. By ignoring the constraints placed upon us by our nature, the Arians have embarked on an enterprise that can only serve to mislead them. Worse than merely futile, this attempt can lead them away from the truth if they should go astray, but cannot take them any closer to God.³⁵ To those who would advocate attempting this sort of project Gregory addresses this thought:³⁶

"We are working at such great things with a lowly tool, in hunting with human wisdom the knowledge of the things that actually are, and trying to reach intelligible things with [our] senses, or even without our senses by which we are carried about

33. Or. 28. 4. 5-6 This is a strengthened paraphrase of Plato's aphorism in *Timaeus* 28c, which is discussed later at more length.

34. Or. 28. 11. 11-12

35. cf. Tsichlis (1981) for a contemporary attempt by an Orthodox deacon to draw parallels between Gregory's view of theology and the hesychast movement and apophatic theology. Gregory surely thinks the neo-Arians try to do too much, but I would not go as far as Tsichlis in relating this conviction to later trends of thought, seminal though Gregory writings are.

36. Or. 28. 21. 2-8

and made to wander. Coming across naked things with our naked mind, we are not able to approach the truth and to stamp [our] mind with what we have grasped.”

We do have some things we can say about God with confidence in their truth,³⁷ but we cannot grasp God. We are unable to reach or understand the divine with our native reason.³⁸

“Every rational nature longs for God and the First Cause, but is unable to grasp [it].”

The repetition of the same thought in these last three quotations should serve to illustrate the depth of Gregory’s conviction on this point. Despite his certainty of our final failure in this quest for God, however, Gregory does not believe that we are left hopeless. We are able to make some useful efforts with the abilities we have been granted. This same nature that keeps us always at a distance from the divine keeps us also headed toward it, as the last quotation above proclaims. Indeed, our reason, so inadequate when relied upon for complete success, is given credit, by Gregory, for leading us, by means of the created, up out of the created realm toward God.³⁹

“Thus the reason which is from God is inherent in all, is the first law in us, is bound to all, and has led us to God by means of visible things.”

We are blessed and cursed at once. Condemned to struggle like Sisyphus,⁴⁰ we are always making progress, but will never reach our goal.

The greatest difficulty in the theological project is how to keep ourselves on the right track, since the same faculty that

37. as Gregory acknowledges in his endorsement of “the One who is” as a true name of God in Or. 30. 18. Wiles (1989), esp. p. 165ff., argues that the acceptance of this as the name of God was not allowed in the same way or to the same degree by the Cappadocians as by their Arian opponents. His argument is persuasive but does not challenge the special place this phrase holds for Gregory, whatever it might show about how far he is willing to hold its truth applies.

38. Or. 28. 13. 24–25

39. Or. 28. 16. 22–25

40. my simile

can lead us on is the one that can most easily lead us astray. We cannot engage in the theological enterprise at all without the use of our reason, and yet, when we depend on that to guide us, we can never be sure that we are not following what *appears* to be reasonable but is, in fact, a misleading semblance of progress. Gregory's answer to this dilemma is to rely on something finer than reason to serve as guide:⁴¹

"Let faith be our guide more than reason, if you have learned [your] weakness from the things near to you and have recognized that *reason* is realizing that there are things beyond reason, so that you need not be completely earthly or only concerned with earthly matters because of your ignorance [of yours]."

So, then, Gregory holds that faith will take us in the right direction as far as we can actually go, and will not lead us astray to try presumptuous methods which will not work or to claim knowledge we do not have. This assumption always stays uppermost in his mind:⁴²

"God: what He is in nature and essence, no human ever *has* discovered, nor ever *will* discover."

The final conclusion of Gregory's reflection on theology in these orations is that advancement is the goal for which we strive in the theological enterprise—not arrival, while wonder is the best result we can hope for—not knowledge. He leaves us with solid hope for real advancement in our knowledge of God, depending on the Incarnation, but is adamant in his opinion that ultimate success is not possible because of the limits of our nature.

We have seen that Gregory requires that theology be considered within the life of its practitioner and within the whole life of the Church. By presenting our ability to approach God as one of the saving results of the Incarnation he has begun to sketch out an understanding of theology and salvation that will link the two ever closer together. Gregory will attempt to delineate the salvific and theological processes in ways that will require agreement with his christology of those who wish to enjoy these saving

41. Or. 28. 28. 41-44

42. Or. 28. 17. 1-2

results. The link between the Incarnation and theology and the ability to achieve the proper reading of Scripture will function for Gregory the same way his connection of the full humanity of Christ with the salvation of human beings functions in his theological letters: as a necessary piece of the salvific construct. Gregory has structured the argument so that agreement with his views is a necessary prerequisite for one who wishes to enjoy salvation, due to his linking of knowledge of God and approach to God with a proper grasp of the Incarnation. This, then, requires of his opponents that they produce not only their own picture of the incarnate Christ but also their own explanation of the working of salvation to go along with it. Gregory is attempting to change the matter at stake from being the right understanding of the relation of Father to Son to the whole way Christian salvation is understood to be worked out through the Incarnation.⁴³ If the neo-Arians cannot move against these positions they can hardly hope to win over the audience of Gregory's orations.

Ephraem moves against the neo-Arians in a slightly different way. Though he feels moved to argue first principles with them as Gregory does, he reacts against their confidence in theological discourse from another angle. While Gregory, as we have seen, argued that theology, while made possible by the Incarnation, could not attain ultimate success, Ephraem attacks their optimistic approach to the task as much for its futility.¹ Ephraem's approach is a further example of the linking

43. see "The Unassumed is the Unhealed", p. 108 ff. in Wiles (1976) for a recent attempt to discuss the great weight the Christian tradition has accorded to Gregory's argument in his Ep. 101 claiming that only adherence to his position makes salvation possible. This form of casting an argument raises the stakes considerably, as Gregory well knows.

1. Murray (1975) p. 15 "The first charge against the "pryers" is a moral one. They are guilty of mistaken self-confidence which has made them fall into presumption and blindness. The second charge is in effect one of mental inflexibility, literalism and inability to distinguish the levels of discourse. The Arian positions on the Trinity are due to their univocal use of language and their inability to think analogically." Compare also with this the following from Griffith (1991) p.41, which may help explain the very great difference in impression on the reader made by Ephraem's works as opposed to Gregory's: "One will search almost in vain in histories of doctrine for

together of theology with religious life which we saw in Gregory. The difference is that he objects to the Arians on the basis of the implications of their effort for their religious life rather than its implications in the realm of philosophical theology. Their immoderate desire to pry into divine matters is, in Ephraem's eyes, inimical to the cultivation of a properly reverent Christian disposition.²

The contrast between intellectual prying and worship is a basic ingredient of Ephraem's thoughts on theology and religious life and forms the background for all his arguments against "forwardness" ܕܒܝܠܐܢܐ. That Ephraem does not intend an attack on all theological reflection must be clear from the following:³

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"Debate in due measure is the medicine of life, but without due measure it is a deadly poison."

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"Whoever believes does not examine, for if he examines he does not believe."⁴

any mention of St. Ephraem as one who made a contribution to the solution of the Arian problem. And in reading the history of this crisis of Christian thinking in the fourth century one is often left with the impression that it was all merely over the effort to find a fitting doctrinal formula in which to state the church's Trinitarian beliefs. St. Ephraem's homilies and hymn. "On Faith" point to another dimension of the issue—the nature of faith itself, and its relationship to the normal ways of human intellectual inquiry," Bruns (1990), p. 48 ff., also draws this distinction between Ephraem and his Arian opponents along the line of what they each were willing to accept as pious and proper discourse about God. The divergence between the two sides of this argument ran extremely deep.

2. Brock (1977) is a good discussion of Ephraem's idea of proper theology as an exercise of wonder instead of an investigation of matters beyond our realm.
3. S 2.189 and S. 3. 69
4. parallels to these can be found at: S 3.9, S 4.133, H 21.6.2 ff., H 80.8.5–6, H 86.1.4–5. A glance at the passages in this list will show that this same concern runs like a thread through these works of Ephraem. Beck (1981) p. 123 says that a radical agnosticism lies at the deepest level of Ephraem's

Ephraem's concern is with due measure. "Due measure", in this context, seems to refer to what is appropriate in light of the nature of the thing examined in this case: God. In Ephraem's mind, real, comprehensive knowledge brings with it superiority over the thing known. How, then, can an attempt to gain knowledge of God be worshipful?⁵

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"Whoever pries into God, his madness is outside of nature: he professes belief in the Being of God but he examines it as if it were a creature. He magnifies it greatly in name, but by his investigation he belittles it."

It seems that this prying into the being of God is the attempt to gain the comprehensive knowledge of God that Gregory held was impossible. 'Examining' is, therefore, picking away at the essence of the divine as opposed to the attempt to gain appropriate knowledge of God. With such overpowering feelings against the inappropriate investigation of the divine, what end does Ephraem foresee for theological investigation if it is undertaken? ⁶

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thought. This agnosticism considers it foolish and a revelation of one's fundamental ignorance of one's place in the ordered creation to attempt to do the impossible.

5. S. 2.477-482

6. H 4.15.7 ff: parallels to this passage are found at H 7.7.9 ff., H 69.13 to the end, H 72.2 and 72.10

“You are present to the one who believes but hidden from the one who examines. Blessed is he who is simple in his seeking you and smart about your promise.”

“Success in theology is granted by God, according to this picture. It comes as the result of God’s pleased response to our acting in the way He desires. It does not come as the result of our efforts, but as the result of His response to our efforts: God is ‘present, to the believer instead of the believer ascending to Him. Because the attempt to search out God in Himself is founded on the hope of a successful effort it is doomed before it has begun. Rather than viewing theology as a “technology” which is chiefly successful through the efforts of someone who is properly trained, Ephraem here presents success in theology as the gift of God in response to the fitting reverent attitude of the human involved. Theology and the life of worship are more than linked, in this picture, they are superimposed on each other. The successful theologian is the one who is the most fit for the life of worship and the most advanced in it. Ephraem seems to sweep away with an impatient hand all the studying and hard-won expertise of those who seek the Truth through applying intellectual skills to a presumptuous methodology and claim that all that avails nothing in the search for God. Theological advancement is shown to be a function of attitude rather than aptitude, for Ephraem.

Ephraem considers this a fundamental truth underlying the theological effort. Our prying into Him is not part of God’s plan for us.⁷

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7. H 70.12-13

"He gave the commandment and forbade prying. In His covenants there is no poking or prying. He gave the law instead of investigation, and in the place of examining He gave faith for our weakness."

The replacement of examining with faith is the denial of the inappropriate use of expertise in favor of reverence. More than failure in theology awaits the one who attempts to approach the divine with the wrong attitude, though: the salvation which the faithful can find in God is not available to the one who examines.⁸

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"Flee, escape from madness—run, take refuge in Christ: but you cannot enter as one who examines—you can draw near as a worshipper."

This reverent faithfulness is the mark of of the Christian, in Ephraem's mind, and the irreverent is the mark that puts one beyond the pale. The root conviction behind this teaching is clearly stated in Hymn 23.2:

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"One who dares to examine is akin to the heathen. He is standing at the point of death just like a forward person. In his investigation he has left his faith so he could go down and delve into the sea of hidden things."

This picture of human curiosity run amok represents the sort of reflection the neo-Arians considered necessary. Ephraem

8. S 3.383–386 compare with this passage H 68.17–19 for much the same sentiments.

cannot imagine these brazen types as properly called Christian at all. We must be very careful to be aware of the distance that separates Ephraem from his opponents here. What is anathema to him is the way of salvation to them. Ephraem is arguing that what the Arians undertake does not carry them closer to God but rather thrusts them outside the protection of the Church and sets them adrift. This is the purpose of his likening one who examines God to an heathen. The examining is, in itself, a sufficient demonstration of the person's spiritual situation, which is, as Ephraem says, "at the point of death". This act of examining, then, is nothing less than suicide.⁹

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"A fool is the one who scrapes at faith with all his questions as a finger's probing does at the eye. Indeed, much more than a finger blinds the eye does prying blind faith."

We will see later a series of Ephraem's striking images of the neo-Arians as blind men fumbling around as they try to seek out God. Here we should realize that Ephraem is presenting their blindness as being self-inflicted, brought on by their own wrong-headed inquiries. Not only does this prying not achieve its object, but it inflicts harm on the person's ability to see clearly and thus makes it less likely that he will be able to respond to a real opportunity to draw closer to God after that. The greatest tragedy of this arrogant behavior is that it carries with it the power to prevent its users from giving it up because it renders them less and less able to realize the difficulties they are causing for themselves.¹⁰ This examining upsets the whole theological process because that process is properly tied to worship and so is a part

9. H 84.2 see also H 47.13

10. The destructive effects of investigation on faith are mentioned in S 2.541 with parallel passages at S 2.499 ff. and H 36,18. It is clear that faith and the urge to examine divine things are not envisaged by Ephraem as possible simultaneous inhabitants of the heart of the same human being.

of the conscious relation of the human being to the divine. It is abundantly clear that Ephraem had this contrast in mind, for he takes up this prying as the theological counterpart of sinful behaviour in the moral realm.¹¹ This connection between behavior and intellectual disposition is made with specific reference to the situation in the Church of Ephraem's own day.¹²

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"Examining is mixed up with faith—which one will win out? The savor of glory as well as of investigation rises up—to which one will He pay heed? Prying and prayer from the same mouth—to which will He hearken?"

We have already seen the force with which Ephraem declares the tendency of examining to destroy one's ability to see clearly. A church in which prying predominated would be prone to lose sight of its nature and purpose. Ephraem is convinced, though that proper behavior, if it exists together with its opposite, can serve to wipe away the effects of improper.¹³ Ephraem's emphasis on the example of the unquestioning obedience and great faith of the saints gone on before¹⁴ is better understood when one realizes that he is prescribing this imitation not only to avoid difficulties but also as a remedy for the difficulties so evident in the Church around him. If proper behavior is made present in the Church through the faithful thoughts and actions of those who are convinced of its propriety, as Ephraem is, their actions will win through to God's eyes and their prayers to His ears, as the

11. cf. H 35.8. 3-4 where the effects of sin and investigation on their perpetrators are compared.

12. H 81.15

13. S 4 87-96 Ephraem compares the calming influence of faith on the mind which has been stirred up by examining to Christ's stilling of the storm. Faith can banish the effects of evil just as the object of that faith could.

14. as. for example in H 56, which is reminiscent of *Heb*, 11 and is meant as the same sort of exhortation through example

will see. God Himself is the spiring as well as the father and we can know Him as both if we accept Him as He presents Himself. Is it fitting for humans to turn their backs on the source of knowledge of God set before them and seek to stop the flow of revelations? Is it better to seek to know God by the use of one's mind in investigation rather than by accepting the truth of Him as He appears before you? To offer an answer other than Ephraem's to these questions would be, in his mind, to reveal oneself to be entirely out of sympathy with his deepest theological convictions.

It is clear from the manner and tone of Ephraem's arguments against the Arian theological effort that it seems to him to be so far astray from proper Christian intellectual activity that he has difficulty coming to grips with it. The presumption of a relationship between creator and created which allows the latter to study the former as a modern scientist would an object in natural science is incomprehensible to Ephraem. That is, he cannot imagine how such an attitude could exist in a Christian milieu. When we see Ephraem call a person who dares to examine God "akin to the heathen" in Hymn 23, we must not read this as a polemical accusation made for its immediate effect, but rather as one person's considered opinion of a form of religious thought that springs from assumptions he can only call blasphemous. The great gulf between the neo-Arian impulse and that of Nicene Christianity should not be underestimated: they spring from very different pictures of the relation of divine to human and do not allow for any harmonization. We should expect that such basic divergence would give rise to claims that the opponent is beyond salvation since each one's opinions of the location of the proper realm for theological effort leaves the other working at, what seems to him, a hopeless task.

Having looked at Ephraem's teaching on the proper approach to theology and the appropriate gain to expect from it, we must turn briefly to look at an aspect of his thought which relates to the positive side of Ephraem's theological construct: the ability of the created world to give us information about its divine creator. This is an important point to take up, because Ephraem's use of it is so prominent. We should know something of what sort of theological reflection Ephraem favored as well as what he thought to be beyond the bounds of what is proper.

It was a commonplace of ancient thought that the works of a person's hands were in some way reflective of his thought or nature. Both *Timaeus* and *Isaiah*¹ refer to the relationship of creator to created as akin to that of potter to clay. It would be more surprising, in light of this precedent in both the secular and religious literature of the age, if Ephraem were to disallow this sort of connection and claim that the natural world cannot tell us anything about its maker than for him to accept this.² Types of the Son in nature are accepted without reservation by Ephraem. Lower things, because of their source and the link they enjoy with the higher, faintly reflect higher things. This is true of the connection between the natures of Christ as well as between creation and the Son:³

ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܝܗܘܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ ܕܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ;
 ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ;
 ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ;
 ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ ܕܡܡܥܐ;

"The type of the Son of the creator is imprinted in the creation: in light, fire, water and all the rest. It is in these and by these, by the type of the majesty, that human nature can approach."

The role of these types in the approach to God is much akin to the role of the Incarnation that Gregory supported. Ephraem places these types among the self-presentations of God to creation which enable humans to move near, just as did the humanity of Christ in Gregory's formulation.

1. 45:9

2. Though how much contact with Greek philosophical ideas Ephraem had is unknown and very much a point of contention among those who produce organized pictures of the early Church, it is not irrelevant to note that the huge dominant culture of Magna Graecia which was flourishing very close to Ephraem's home would also have assumed this connection between creator and created. One need not kowtow to a culture in order to agree with it when it states something one was inclined to accept anyway. cf. Murray (1975) p. 13 quoted above, which allows this point, though reluctantly.

3. H 25.7

help of Scripture. Elsewhere,⁶ Ephraem does hold that Scriptural language about God has actual value and cannot be set aside. The contrast between that value and the secondary representations found in nature is one of levels of dependability. We should take these natural images as evidence of Ephraem's belief in the multi-leveled nature of theological inquiry and in the immanence of God, recognizing always that they are not meant to be more than helpful human constructions.

It is the combination of Scripture and images in nature as positive tools for theological work that is the message of this section. Ephraem allows real knowledge of God to be drawn from creation as well as Revelation. He sees everything around him as full of meaning and useful for the gaining of insight. Thus, when Ephraem speaks so sternly against the wrong sort of inquiry we must not think that he is a pessimist about human hopes of knowing God or that he is opposed to theological reflection. It would be closer to the truth to consider Ephraem as an optimist in his willing acceptance of so much help in this quest.

This comparison has shown that both Gregory and Ephraem have high hopes for the success of theological work but also have firm ideas about the limits of possible success. Their over-riding concerns are with the approach of the inquirers and the attitude it betokens on their part. It is the reverence of the seeker reflected in his sense of the possibilities of human inquiry that is the real *sine qua non* for theological success, not his training or intelligence. In the midst of a controversy where the opposing side seems to err by placing too much emphasis on human intellectual techniques above all, both of these writers wish to state clearly that their priorities are ordered differently. With this instructive contrast at the front of our minds, the main section of the work of this study begins.

6. 44.1-2 e.g.

CHAPTER II

USE OF SCRIPTURE

Let us turn first to the struggle over the proper method of reading Scripture. This, the most basic question of theological method, was a crucial area of contention in the Arian Controversy because it determined the legitimacy of the proofs brought forward to buttress each side's arguments.

In general, an author's method of interpretation is learned by observing his use of it rather than by its direct explication by him. Both Ephraem and Gregory, however, being fully aware of the importance of this question, included a number of explicit comments on the subject in the works under examination. These will prove very helpful for our task.

Gregory pays close attention to the details of the content of the scriptural passages he treats. He uses his grammatical training as well as his common sense to approach the texts. For example:

In Or. 30.4 Gregory examines the word 'until', which has been used by his opponents to downgrade the reign of Christ¹ and thus His divinity. After stating the proper grammatical function of until².

"However, you suffer this [difficulty of comprehension] because you do not understand that 'until' does not wholly divide off the future but can govern 'up to' some time but not deny what lies beyond it".

I. Proclaimed in passages such as *I Cor.* 15:25. "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet".

2. Or. 30.4.8-11.

After making this general grammatical point, Gregory puts forward a particular example of a passage that would be misunderstood if the Arian reading of 'until' were accepted.⁵ Thus he comes to a conclusion on its meaning in Scripture by an examination of what it means in language in general with addition of a scriptural example. He does not permit the meaning of the word in Scripture to be widened to fit a theological presupposition, as the Arians desired to do. So, the language of Scripture is treated as secular language unless there is an obvious need to do otherwise.⁴

A further example of his treating of scriptural language as common language is found in Or. 30.10 where Gregory examines the meaning of *dunamai* "to be able" by collating its various occurrences in relevant texts. He discovers that the range of meaning necessary for clear understanding of these scriptural verses is too wide to fit the rigid category the Arians desire. They wish to read *John* 5:19⁵ as a denial of independent action by the Son. The interesting detail in this is that Gregory's examples of uses of 'to be able' which do not describe eternally fixed circumstances, and so require for 'to be able' the broader range of meaning he proposes, are drawn not from Scripture but from everyday life. This tactic requires a tacit assumption that language in Scripture is of a piece with language elsewhere. Gregory will not accept limitations on it in Scripture that it does not follow as a matter of course. In this instance, linguistic use is discovered to be inexact and not susceptible to rigid artificial categorization at all. 'Not being able to do something' does not always mean the same thing, Gregory concludes. The state does not always spring from the same cause. Gregory will not allow Scripture to be bound to a standard which does not fit how language is actually used. As in the previous example,

3. *Mtt* 28:20. "...lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

4. An example of the need to do otherwise will be seen below in the case of verb tenses where the alternative to widening one's understanding of Scripture is to accept that the text of Scripture can sometimes be nonsense. The plain sense is accepted by Gregory if intelligible and sensible.

5. "Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what hings soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."

Gregory's treatment of scriptural language on the human level is a recognition of its human inconsistencies. The Revelation may spring from a divine source but it issues in the created realm.

In Or. 29.5, in the face of an Arian claim that the Son was begotten at a particular time and so had a beginning, Gregory recites a catalogue of texts which show clearly how unusual the use of verb tenses is in Scripture. A past tense does not always describe a past event.⁶ Again, the strict rules are shown to be inapplicable and Scripture is treated as it is rather than according to rules imposed from outside of it.

In Or. 31.3 and Or. 31.18 Gregory castigates those who would lose the sense of Scripture by over-attention its letter. In this case, those who would deny true divinity to the Spirit because it is never explicitly stated in Scripture. The truth found in Scripture, Gregory contends, is made clear by the actions of the Spirit which are reported there. Since these are the actions of divinity, the Spirit must be divine, he concludes. This approach demonstrates Gregory's desire to discern the meaning of Scripture from what lies *in* it rather than by a method of applying frameworks *to* it. Since the neo-Arians customarily chose to argue from names to realities⁷ rather than to derive their use of language from the reality they endeavored to describe, Gregory understandably argues against that sort of picking over of vocabulary in the reading of Scripture and insists upon a more natural method of interpretation. He wishes to treat human language as a human form of communication rather than as a puzzle to be deciphered.⁸

6. Gallay (1978) rightly says that this stems from difficulty in translating Hebrew verbs into the Greek of the Septuagint text Gregory knew. Note 2, p. 186.

7. cf. Hanson (1988) p. 606.

8. cf. Hanson (1988) p. 827-828: "The insistence of the Arians upon pressing the analogy or metaphor of Father and Son too far drove the pro-Nicenes to examine the nature of language about God and to become markedly more sophisticated than their opponents about using it. They warn against too great rationalism in exegesis. They can even protest against a too wooden and factual acceptance of the words of Scripture, especially when dealing with the first chapters of Genesis: God did not literally walk nor literally speak, and so on. Almost everybody had learnt from Origen the doctrine

What does Gregory do if the plain sense of Scripture is not immediately clear? He turns further into Scripture for guidance, rather than to linguistic theory, by comparing the passage in question with other similar ones or other occurrences of the difficult elements. So, in Or. 30.6, Or. 30.13, and Or. 30.14 we find Gregory interpreting one verse of Scripture by reference to another. This method requires an assumption that the various books of Scripture form a unified revelation, a traditional premise of Christian argument Gregory was glad to accept.⁹

To this point Gregory's treatment of Scripture is not unusual. It is only at the close of the orations¹⁰ that Gregory sets himself apart from the rest of his contemporaries in what he is willing to assert about the scriptural revelation. In these pages, Gregory asserts that the use in theological discussion of non-scriptural words and phrases is inevitable because of the nature of the scriptural witness.¹¹ We are not to shy away from stating

of 'accommodation', that is the idea that God accommodates his language and ideas when communicating with people to the limitations of their understanding and even of their culture. And the pro-Nicenes are quite often ready to appeal behind the words of Scripture to their intention or drift (*skopos*)". cf. also p. 849 in the same work where a sense of the *skopos* of Scripture is praised by Hanson as legitimate. It is the rigidity of this Arian rational exegesis that Gregory attempts to replace with a more flexible reading of Scripture.

9. Turner, (1954) p. 263-264, discusses the conviction of the unity of the scriptural revelation in the patristic period. "The unity of the two Testaments was almost an axiom for the Fathers". Turner provides a host of citations, predominantly from Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Origen's views on this matter would certainly have been widely known during the fourth century, but even without that concrete evidence of the presence of this idea in the theological writings prior to the Arian Controversy, intelligent reading of patristic works makes quite clear that virtually no Father would have even considered the possibility that Scripture was anything other than a seamless whole. The idea of a *skopos* of Scripture in itself implies unity.
10. Dr. Or. 31.21-24.
11. Dr. John McGuckin, of Leeds University, England, pointed out to me at a conference that this position of support for the use of extra-scriptural language in theology was also held by Athanasius, e.g. *De Decretis* sec. 21, with the great example being his use of it to support his acceptance of the *homoousios* Gregory is involved in a very different sort of effort here. Rather than trying to overcome the reluctance of traditionalists who agree with his position but shy away from his bold vocabulary, as Athanasius was in his efforts to win the support of the 'semi-Arians' for the creed of

clearly what is never stated clearly in Scripture itself but only implied. The way to stay true to Scripture is *not* to cling slavishly to the words of the Book and only those, but rather to discern the meaning of those words and hold to *that* firmly and express *that* clearly.¹² If the passage appears to be at odds with the *okopos* it must be understood in light of the *skopos*.

So, for Gregory, Scripture is unified but not always explicit in its message. Its details require the greatest attention on their *own* terms, and, what is most difficult, words and passages must be read in their own contexts to be properly understood¹³ but can also be illuminated by comparison with other parts of the Revelation. The scholar must apply to each passage all of the tools at his disposal and rely on the traditional interpretation of Scripture and the Church's sense of the over-riding message contained in the Scriptures to hold him right as he works through these steps.¹⁴ This is the manner in which Gregory harmonizes the need for intellectual acuteness with the necessity of remaining

Nicea, Gregory is attempting to uphold the use of non-scriptural words against opponents who wish to transfer the entire debate onto an extra-scriptural ground of their own choosing. What is new in Gregory's use of this argument is that he reintroduces it in a completely different context from Athanasius' earlier circumstances. Where Athanasius was arguing to convince traditionalists, see Williams (1987) especially pp. 175 ff., Gregory's opponents were determined neologizers. The use of an old tactic in a new situation is, in itself, an innovation.

12. cf. Or. 31.24.8ff. Norris, (1991) ad loc., says: "The adversaries, both Eunomians and Pneumatomachians (the former here in focus), are like Jewish literalists because they think the letter is the most important aspect of the text. They do not grasp that the fundamental meaning of any Biblical passage is the reality about which it speaks, *ta nooumena*, not the actual words in which it speaks, *ta legomena*". This is, in fact, an argument for the *skopos* of Scripture to have precedence over the wording of a particular passage.
13. as the discussion of *dunamai* and verb tenses show.
14. The importance of the tradition of the Church in the matter of the divinity of the Spirit is shown by its being introduced by Gregory in Or. 31.21 before he starts his discussion of the nature of Scripture. The theologian operating without the control of the tradition is sure to go wrong because the multiplicity and flexibility of the tools at his command offer too many branching paths from which to choose. It is telling that Gregory places this argument against over-literalism just before he discusses the nature of scriptural language. He wishes to plea for intelligent reading, not merely detailed reading.

faithful to what he thinks is the Church's teaching. With that understanding of his general view of the proper treatment of Scripture in our minds we now proceed to Gregory's christological exegesis.

Gregory has a clear idea of what should be attributed to the divinity in Christ and what to the humanity, though his way of speaking of the human nature varies. He contrasts the divinity in Christ with the lower nature: *ho sunthetos* 'the one put together'¹⁵ in the command:

"Apply the more lofty [sayings] to the divinity, the nature more powerful than sufferings and the body. [Apply] the more lowly [sayings] to the composite [nature]."

In Or. 30.1 the contrast of higher with lower is of divinity with the new Adam, thus:

"[We have been] attributing the sayings which are more lofty and suitable for God to the divinity and those more lowly and human to the new Adam, the God made passible for us on account of sin...!"

and in Or. 30.2 it is a contrast of causeless divinity with caused humanity as follows:

5. Or. 29. 18. 21 ff. See also Or. 30. 15, Or. 30. 15 Or. 30. 16, and Or. 30. 21. Compare also Athanasius *De Decr*, 3.14 (P. G. XXV col. 440c) where Athanasius uses the same technique of double attribution to read this same story of Lazarus. D. F. Winslow, (1971) p. 391 ff., discusses the exegesis the Lazarus story by Gregory at length, finding it to be driven by Gregory's christological concerns *vis a vis* the Arians.

1. There is another passage which makes its comparison between the divinity and humanity in Christ on the basis of passibility and impassibility. Or. 30. 15. 18–20. The frequent mention of that particular contrast seems likely to stem from the exegetical crux of attempting to read the various christological verses in the New Testament as all referring to the same individual. Gregory is clearly well aware of the difficulties involved. Indeed, an examination of the polemical literature of the Arian Controversy gives this reader the clear impression that this difficulty was not only the central battleground of the two parties but was very likely the cause of the quarrel's arising to begin with. R. Lyman, (1989) pp. 494–495, specifically disagrees that the difficulties were fundamentally exegetical but refers them rather to "a tacit rejection of a possible centrality of religious concern for Christ as human exemplar in ancient Christology." (She refers the position of the

“What we find to be from a cause we assign to the humanity, what is simple and without cause we reckon to the divinity”.

It is clear from these three extracts that Gregory is concentrating on the question of the attribution of different verses to the two natures of Christ rather than on the proper way to speak of His humanity. He would not otherwise needlessly complicate his picture of Christ by calling the lower nature in Christ *ho sunthetos* ‘the composite’, *ho theos pathētos* ‘the god made passible’, as well as *hē anthrōpotēs* ‘the humanity’ in the same series of sermons. These texts show that Gregory reads the gospels through the lense of his concern for attributing the various statements about Christ to the different natures and interpreting them according to his understanding of Christian doctrine. This procedure is satisfying to him, and was to later Christians reading the orations, because this method of exegesis, with both a divine and human referent, is able to account intelligently for all the Christological texts in the New Testament, as well as for many we would not now think applicable. The Arians could not do the same. Their understanding of Scripture was much embarrassed by the very texts which Gregory would take to be decisive statements of

centrality of exegesis to Gregg and Groh, both their book and various articles.) H. A. Wolfson, (1958) p. 13, on the other hand, holds for the primacy of Scripture in the Arian Controversy. “Within philosophy itself there were to them [the Fathers] only right doctrines, which were in agreement with Scripture, and wrong doctrines, which were in disagreement with Scripture, In battling with each other, the Fathers did not battle as partisans of certain opposing schools of greek philosophy; they battled only as advocates of opposing interpretations of Scripture.” When a scholar who was so involved in the study of philosophy pushes it into second place we should take note. L. R. Wickham, (1968) p. 558, note 1, says, “Moreover, theology, I believe, for Aetius and Eunomius is the exegesis of the inspired words of the Bible—doubly inspired, for all real concepts are God-given and the Holy Scriptures so in a special sense.” If this is true for the neo-Arians, would it not be even more so for their less abstractly minded predecessors? With so much variety of opinion among scholars, the point may be considered open.

Vaggione, (1976) p. 184, notes that Eunomius (*Apol*, *Apol*, III) specifically denies the validity of this exegesis by dual attribution and claims that Basil, to whose work his *Apology on the Apology* replies, is preaching two Christs by using it and is “perverting Scripture to his own ends”, as Vaggione puts it.

Christ's divinity. The range of statements about Christ in the New Testament spreads beyond the ability of Arian theology to explain.²

The difficulty for the neo-Arians stems from the heart of their theological programme: their conviction of the less-than-full divinity of the Son. Because of their belief that the passages in the gospels which depict Jesus under-going the normal experiences of human life are demonstrating His deficient divinity, the Arians read all these texts as if they referred to the same entity: the incarnate Son, i. e. the higher nature. While this allowed them the satisfaction of holding up texts such as *Luke 2:52*³ as evidence of the Son's changeable nature, the one-dimensional character of their exegesis embarrassed them when they tried to treat other texts⁴ which they were not able to dissociate from the Son. Gregory's exegetical method is a flexible instrument which allows him to accept all Christological texts and to parcel them out to whichever of the natures they fit. He is thus able to account for all the material in question without embarrassment, while the Arian method allows for only those texts which reflect their assessment of the Son. The Arians' failure to devise a more defensible (in apologetic terms) system of exegesis was a large contributor to their failure to hold the allegiance of the mass of the Church.

2. We should note that in Or. 31. 3 Gregory takes a verse that is clearly Christological (*Jn.* 1:9 from the prologue to *John*, on less: "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world".) and applies it to all three Persons of the Trinity. Gallay, (1978) p. 280, objects to this strongly while pointing out how unusual in patristic literature it is. Norris (1991) does not treat it. Surely, even taking into account the great difference between the norms of patristic exegesis and those of our own day, if this is meant as exegesis it is inexcusable. This passage is not convincing, if read as straight-forward exegesis, however. The tenor of the passage seems to be more one of purposely over-blown rhetoric rather than of dishonest exegesis. Gregory is making the point, as he does in Or. 31. 10, that he is willing to go to the length of stating outright that the Spirit is God in the same way as Father and Son. The attaching of this verse, which is emblematic of the lofty nature of the Son and His actions in the created realm, to all three Persons is not meant by Gregory as exegesis but as a mocking challenge to the Arians who shy away from any hint of making equals to the Father. It should not be considered as representative of Gregory's exegetical system.

3. "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man".

4. e. g. *John* 1:1-14.

Ephraem's use of Scripture

As the examination of Ephraem's use of Scripture begins, we should keep in mind that his media of expression, the hymn and metrical sermon, render much shorter individual pieces than Gregory's orations, with the possible exception of his second sermon *On the Faith*, and so lend themselves less to explanation of a technique than to a demonstration of it through use. The tone of Ephraem's writings is also less hospitable to methodological reflection than is Gregory's more overtly academic approach. We will learn more of Ephraem's ideas by observation than by his direct explication of them.

Ephraem displays delicacy of touch in his use of Scripture. He treats it with reverence but firmness, taking it to pieces to probe its meaning while treating it as the true Word of God. He is able both to revere it and examine it without feeling that these attitudes are contradictory, because he considers it made for investigation aimed at plumbing the depths of its meaning. In Ephraem's opinion, we cannot know the divine without it and cannot know the divine truly and completely even with it, as this passage on the inability of artists to portray the face of Moses on his return from meeting God at Sinai emphasizes.⁵

ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܠܝܢ
ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ
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ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܡܘܨܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ

"If the countenance of a mortal old man, because he was anointed slightly by a heavenly tint, put colors to confusion and caused artists to stray, who, then, is going to portray the nature of Existence which can never be completely seen? For of whomever it is written that he saw Him, indeed he did not do so, but rather only saw a shape in which He wrapped Himself".

5. 33. 12-13.

Even when we are told the facts of what happened to a fellow mortal we cannot grasp it. How can we expect to grasp the truth of divine? Scripture does not attempt to show us the true reality of God but only to give us as much of a hint as we can grasp. Scripture exists on our own level of being⁶. The revelations depicted in its pages are partial as are the explanations we devise when we endeavour to make sense of them. Our inability to meet even this partial revelation as it deserves is the primary stumbling block in our appropriation of the truths of Scripture. Our confused nature is no match for its simplicity⁷.

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ܠܕܢܐ ܠܕܢܐ ܠܕܢܐ
ܠܕܢܐ ܠܕܢܐ ܠܕܢܐ

"Scripture is clear".

"Our sin disturbs [our] nature and our investigation disrupts the Scriptures".

These epigrammatic statements, coming so close together in the same hymn, underline Ephraem's awareness of our capacity to cause harm, not only in ourselves but for the Scriptures themselves. This balance, which is foreign to us but necessary for the interpretation of Scripture, will be demanded, and striven for, by Ephraem throughout his examination of scriptural texts.

Ephraem sees Scripture as having a variety of different sorts of usefulness for the devout hearer: it provides inspirational examples for behavior and solid premises for theological reflection.

6. R. Murray (1975), p. 5, in a discussion of Ephraem's use of symbols, makes the same connection between Scripture and the created world that we have made in regard to Gregory: "for Ephrem biblical types do not stand on their own as a special, isolated mode of revelation. He never treats the biblical text as a world on its own: rather, the Bible, as a work of God in human imagery and language, is a part, as well as a special interpreter, of the whole world and its history." This acceptance that Scripture exists within creation, and so is subject to the laws of creation, is much akin to the understanding of Scripture that led Gregory to apply to its language the same tools he had been taught to bring to bear on pagan literature. Each author is willing to approach Scripture as an object amenable to rational study.

7. H 35. 7. 7 and H 35. 8. 3-4.

Ephraem also finds within Scripture the ammunition for an attack on Arian ideas on the use and nature of Scripture.

Scripture as a source of inspiration for behavior, one of the most basic applications for believers, is one that Ephraem applies not only to every-day life or the laity of the Church but to trained theologians as well, who are, in his mind, much in need of correction. Sermon 4.93 + 95 presents the stilling of the storm⁸ as a model for our need to still inquiry and to let our faith be at rest. This is an example of the interpretation of a narrative to render a spiritual principle rather than a strictly practical moral command. The behavior indicated is more theological than ethical. Hymn 7.3 ff.⁹ provides a list of true believers portrayed in Scripture who did not question the instructions they were given. This, together with the negative examples of the Scribes and Pharisees,¹⁰ provides vivid aid to the Christian in search of memorable instruction. We should note particularly the contrast of the centurion with Thomas in Hymn 7 strophe 11 which shows Ephraem juxtaposing the positive with the negative for greater effect.¹¹ One's success in theology, for Ephraem, is dependent on one's relationship to God, so scriptural examples applicable to a consideration of theology are of people acting rightly or otherwise in their dealing with the divine. These passages can function as examples of theological activity, in Ephraem's mind, not merely of moral or immoral behavior. This view places theology firmly in the midst of the life of worship and of the people of God rather than establishing it as an individual intellectual enterprise. This is an eloquent, if implicit, indication of Ephraem's idea of where the Arians have placed theology and of how to make their approach vulnerable to counter-argument. Failure in theology means not only a failure to advance in intellectual understanding

8. e. g. *Mark* 4:35 ff.

9. Compare with this passage the following passages from other hymns: H 8.9, H 9.7.7 + H 9.8.5, H 65.1.3 ff., H 86.3, all of which provide other examples of scriptural characters presented to the believer as models of right behaviour.

10. Compare with this instance of an example of incorrect behaviour the following passages from other hymns which also provide instruction by presenting failures to be avoided: H 44.9, H 55.12. H 56.4.

11. Compare also H 8.8.7 ff. where Old Testament priests are contrasted with Christian priests in the same sort of juxtaposition of positive with negative examples.

of the divine, it is also a failure in one's relationship with God, which carries much greater loss in its wake. Wishing to reinforce the dire consequences of the mistaken neo-Arian approach to theology, Ephraem argues that the wrong relationship between God and Man can lead to more than mere academic confusion:¹²

ܠܗܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ
 ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ
 ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ
 ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ
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 ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ
 ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܢܗ

"O, fountain of wonder, which is clear and disturbed on two sides: for it is completely limpid to those who are themselves clear and is made clear when drunk pure. To those who are disturbed it is disturbed because they are disturbed, just as the sweet is bitter to the sick."

So the relationship to God and the relationship to Scripture are intertwined to the point of identification, and the wrong relationship can render fruitless a person's efforts to reach a proper knowledge of the divine, despite the aid of Revelation. This is the bitterness that the sick person tastes even from what is truly sweet (i. e. the divine). The stress Ephraem places on these scriptural examples comes from his conviction that failure in behavior and in theological efforts go hand in hand. These moral examples stand at the heart of his understanding of theology.

The more explicitly theological premises which Ephraem derives from Scripture or defends from it are well calculated to strike at the heart of the Arians' disagreements with him, and do so on a level his opponents could more readily understand.

Hymn 29.6.5 uses *Isaiah* 45:9¹³ as a direct attack on the Arian presumption in examining God.¹⁴

12. H 35.4.1-6 The fountain of which Ephraem speaks here is the Scripture.

13. "Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?"

14. Compare also H 71.13

ܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ
 ܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ
 ܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ
 ܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ
 ܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ
 ܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ ܕܡܐܕܒܐ

“His names convince you how and what to call Him. One He taught: that He is. Another: that He is the Creator. He showed you also that He is good and made you know too that He is just. He was also called and given the name of Father. The Scriptures are a furnace; why, then, does the fool babble on? Search in His furnace for His names and excellences.”¹⁵

Ephraem's first theological premise is the sufficiency of Scripture for the description of the divine. Scripture provides us with appropriate terms for God; where then is the need to babble on trying to express what is given to us? This is an attack on attempts create terms for God outside of Scripture.¹⁶ Indeed, later on in the same hymn Ephraem makes clear his conviction that the created world is not up to the task of portraying the divine.¹⁷

15. H 44.1 Compare also H 51.7.1 which speaks against the use of non-Scripture names for God and H 60.2 which asks whether we are to assume that the names we are given in Scripture were put there to mislead us. If they are not, then why are we expected [by the Arians to search beyond them (presumably for something better)?

16. It is interesting to see Ephraem's conservative reluctance to use terms beyond those found in Scripture. He will later show himself and adept in theological reasoning, but we should keep in mind that this effort of his falls into the category of necessary evils in Ephraem's mind. Greek traditionalists, e.g. Eusebius of Caesarea, had felt the same way earlier in the Arian Controversy, but had been unable to stem the tide of change in the Church's profession of faith. Prof. S. Griffith, in private conversation, has remarked upon the greater theological possibilities afforded by Syriac New Testament vocabulary than by the Greek original. Ephraem seems here to feel no inherent need to go beyond the bounds of Scripture, but is surely reconciled to it by the exigencies of the debate underway at the time.

17. strophe 7.5-6. Compare also H 65.2 for the same sentiment. H 69.7 and H 75.22 hold that Scripture is the route to God.

ܐܠܐ ܐܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܐܠܐ ܐܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

“Even if He wanted to describe Himself to us, it is not by means of creation He could interpret Himself.”

There is no point in our searching beyond Scripture for the proper means to describe God. Since it is not in the nature of created things for God to express Himself adequately through them and, yet, this created realm is all we know, we have no hope of success. If what we are given is not enough to answer our questions we must rest content nonetheless. The exact information available to us is that which is found in Scripture. We cannot hope for better elsewhere. Even God cannot engage in successful natural theology without something more in nature to help Him, and nature gives no sign of offering more. This does not mean that Ephraem pushes aside *any* help that natural theology might offer for a person seeking to know God. He does not wish to rule all of that sort of reflection out of court. In fact, Ephraem is famous for relying heavily throughout his works on the illustrations of the divine found in the created realm. What Ephraem wishes to make crystal clear is that Scripture is the *sine qua non* of any successful effort at theology and the dependable starting point for it. Creation can furnish useful aids to the task but cannot serve as the basis for the entire project, as the above quotation from Hymn 44.1 shows. The following passage stresses the complementary character of the two media of communication.¹⁸

ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

“For, if they had made nature cleave to Scripture, they could have learned the Lord of both from both. Nature shows by revealed things, and Scripture, too, by simple things.”

18. H 35.10.5 ff.

ܐܢܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ
 ܐܢܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ
 ܐܢܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ
 ܐܢܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ
 ܐܢܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ

“Flee and hide yourself in the commandment from which you might perish or might live. Seek out which of the commandments could be the key to your life and see which commandment serves its time and is served by it. For you must not stray when you hear texts which seem to be at variance. There is a text which decrees offerings and one in which their savor is despised. There is a text in which *these* foods are clean and a text which says ‘mingle [these things] and eat’. There is a text which does away with festivals, a text which profanes festivals, while there is a text which sanctifies the day, and a text which despises the Sabbath. There is a text: ‘Circumcise the male’ and a text which despises circumcision. All of these, when you hear them, place both sides under examination.”

Here, in the matter of direct commandments for behavior, dear to the hearts of those who take Scripture as their guide, Ephraem is willing to admit direct disagreement within Scripture and to put forward the use of reason as the solution. His insistence on Scripture's primacy has not led Ephraem to misrepresent its difficulties.

Ephraem makes a distinction between commandments of universal application and those of only temporary validity.²¹

ܐܢܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ
 ܐܢܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ
 ܐܢܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ
 ܐܢܬܐ ܡܠܐ ܕܝܚܝܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ

21. S. 3.153 ff.

an earlier time. An acknowledgement that Revelation contains this sort of disagreement within itself is the acknowledgement that Scripture contains things that are no longer true as well things that are still valid. Ephraem's understanding of Scripture could hardly be farther from monolithic.

Ephraem's acknowledgement of the difficulties in the proper reading of Scripture will require him to construct a careful method of exegesis. A very good example of the sophistication he achieves in this area is found²⁴ where Ephraem undertakes an examination of *Genesis* 1:3. The first angle of approach is seen in strophe 9 of Hymn 6 which shows Ephraem interpreting the verse through the use of reason:

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
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 ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ

"This should be investigated: why God was speaking in words and then the work came to be. Is His will too weak to create in silence? Did He embody the thing He said and it became the works? These two possibilities are overthrown and the third one is victorious: He was issuing a command to His Second".

The first possibility is rejected because God is not too weak for anything, while the second would require a double creation, and smacks of the Gnostic tendency to have the words of God

24. H 6.9

take on separate existence as aeons, and so is beyond the pale for an orthodox Christian. The third makes sense because it fits what Ephraem accepts as sure knowledge: the existence of the Son and His work as creator. This approach is an example of Ephraem's reason at work on what he considers to be the facts of the matter.

Strophe 10 shows Ephraem making use of the comparison of one scriptural text with another in order to understand them more clearly.

ܠܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ
 ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ
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 ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ

"If someone should say that God issued a command to the work to be created, this is undone in the case of Adam. For He did not say to it 'let us make Man in our image'. He did not speak to a companion nor did He issue a command to a servant, for it was not appropriate that a servant should come to be through a fellow-servant, but rather all of them [created things] were created through the Son."

The creation of humankind is a useful basis for comparison because it is described in *Genesis* in somewhat greater detail than the creations of the previous five days. Because God does not address the object of His creative effort when He creates Adam, Ephraem rules out the possibility of the object being created

being addressed when God speaks as He creates the light and the rest of creation. That God addressed a companion is denied because it would require a multiplicity of Gods, while His speaking to a previously created creature who would then act as demiurge is denied on the grounds of its perceived inappropriateness²⁵. Thus Ephraem settles for the Son as the object of the address: He is another person, but not another God; He already exists, but is not a created being. All the stumbling blocks are avoided.

Here, Ephraem's examination of one text through another is aided by the knowledge that a two-tiered act of creation (that of a servant through a fellow servant) would be inappropriate, again because of its reminiscence of Gnostic views. Reason shows that the Son, to be the true creator, must be creator of all. This removes the possibility of another person being present at the creation except the Son (and the Father). So the Son is left as the object of the Father's address. Ephraem has expressed his thought fully enough in this strophe for the audience to follow his reasoning and be convinced. He expects the argument to win assent by its logical power.

Strophe 14 shows Ephraem at work on the verse by means of grammatical analysis through the distinction between direct address to a person and the issuing of a commandment impersonally without directly addressing the person commanded.

ܐܒܝ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
 ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
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 ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ

25. We will see later that Gregory allows great weight in theological argument to this idea of what is fitting for God and what is not.

“It is perfectly clear that if He commanded the earth by saying ‘Let it bring forth’, making use of an imperative manner, then He would speak with the earth as He did with Eve: ‘In pain will you give birth’. But, instead of saying ‘Let it bring forth’, He said ‘Bring forth’”.

This is pure grammar, without any other elements applied.

These three strophes, all part of an examination of the same text, make absolutely clear that Ephraem’s method of examining Scripture, when laid out fully for us to see, is much akin to that of Gregory. Reason, the use of Scripture to interpret Scripture and attention to grammatical detail are all interwoven in an attempt to reach the truth of the text. This is not an approach congenial to the Arians, as Athanasius had earlier noted.²⁶ The Arians preferred to treat their scriptural texts as individual building blocks for their positions rather than using them to understand other ones.²⁷

This isolation of each verse into a discrete entity carrying a single true proposition brings a great disadvantage in its wake as well as a great polemical advantage. The disadvantage is that it denies the reader the ability to clear up an obscure passage by appeal to clear ones because it does not admit that the different parts of Scripture are connected as parts of a whole. This is a great impoverishment of one’s ability to use the breadth of Scripture. The polemical advantage is that it frees the person who holds it from all the awkward constructing of elaborate schemes required to make coherent sense of passages of Scripture which seem irreconcilable when juxtaposed. The Arians made much use of this sort of difficulty when it appeared in the works of their opponents.

The Arians, then, had little sense of the unity of the scriptural revelation and little interest in the problem of how to weigh divergent portions of it against one another. This is a difficulty which looms large in the minds of all those who try to harmonize the various books of Scripture into one coherent revealed message. Gregory, as we have seen, allows for the

26. see Pollard (1959) p.416

27. Compare the quotation from Hansen (1988) pp. 827-828 above.

has successfully blended a conviction of the value of Scripture with a realization of its internal variety.

In light of this, consider Ephraem's pronouncement on the proper method of reading verses of Christological import, which was always a stumbling block for the Christian exegete. Like Gregory, Ephraem considers it necessary to be able to account for all the texts which were thought at that time to be descriptive of Christ:³²

ܠܐ ܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ

"In order that the matter may be brought to light, set aside those verses which proclaim the smallness and the greatness of our Lord. For the one, understand His humanity and for the other, understand His divinity."

This method of reading the gospels, central to the Nicene theological endeavour and also explicitly and emphatically upheld by Gregory,³³ has the great additional strength of enabling those who hold to it to treat with equal seriousness all the verse which deal with the deeds and nature of Christ. Thus, Ephraem can say with equal conviction that Christ has taken on human names as part of His mercy in the Incarnation,³⁴ while insisting on the full divinity of Christ,³⁵ and insisting that Christ's humanity as portrayed in the Gospels was assumed for our benefit and is proper to us rather than to Him.³⁶

32. H 53.9.1-4 compare with this strophe 4 of the same hymn where Ephraem asks why God would not make clear to us in Scripture that the Son and Spirit are creatures if this is so. Ephraem's answer is that they are not creatures because it is not clearly stated and that Scripture is a source of information which can be trusted not to mislead us if read properly. The existence of difficulties is not denied, but the possibility of sorting through them successfully is upheld. This must be kept in mind when strophe 9 is read.

33. Or. 29.18.21 ff. Gregory is quite clear that this method is central to his understanding of the New Testament.

34. H 5.7.1-4

35. H 54.1 ff.

36. H 54.8

ܡܢ ܐܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

"For it is written that our Good Lord repented and was weary because He put on our weakness. He also changed us and made us put on the titles of His greatness. The foolish saw what was proper to us and thought that that thing which was ours was His."



This dual exchange of attributes enables Ephraem to accept any christological verse and make it a coherent part of his christological picture. There will be no awkward stretching of language or logic as was required of the Arians to cope with texts which seemed to demand a fully divine Son or Christ. Like Gregory, Ephraem can cover the full range of Scripture without needing to choose to give up either what he wishes to claim for the Son or for the human nature He took on. Indeed, his defence of the humanity and the divinity go hand in hand. This coherence is evidence of the fittingness of the role of Scripture, in Ephraem's opinion:³⁷

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
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 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ


"Nature is at your fingertips and the Scriptures before your eyes. Nature is difficult for you but the Scripture is open to you. It is not from nature that we have learned Christ. It was right that, from where we learned His humanity, from there we should properly learn His divinity."


37. H 65.2 N.B. again how Ephraem stresses the primacy of the scriptural revelation over knowledge of God gained elsewhere.

Ephraem expects the information about both natures to spring from the same source because of their unity in Christ and the unity of revelation. We can see his interlacing of the information offered by nature and that offered by Scripture in the elements of Ephraem's Explanation of the proper reading of *Mark* 13:32,³⁸ which is found in Hymn 77.5 ff. The argument proceeds in clearly worked out steps.

a) Here he claims that the Arians fly in the face of logic by claiming that the 'Lord of hours'   does not know the hour of the coming of the End-time. Thus he recalls the premise he had introduced by means of *Isaiah* 45:9.³⁹

b) Ephraem needs to bolster the Son's divine status to give the *Isaiah* quotation its full weight, so he refers to the baptism of Jesus to show the connection between the three Persons of the Trinity which he takes as evidence of their equality,⁴⁰ thus making use of Scripture to interpret Scripture and also turning an incident which was usually a favorite tool of those who wish to depict a subordinate Christ into one which proclaims His loftiness.

c) Then Ephraem locates the lack of knowledge in the body  assumed by the Word which is the way in which he has suggested this sort of text be read.⁴¹

The result of this is that the 'Lord of hours' is the one who is linked at the baptism to the Father and the Holy Spirit and is also the one being baptized, while the  which was assumed by the Word is also the Son who does not know the hour. So in each incident the humanity and the divinity are seen as distinct yet are intertwined by the cross-referencing of the two natures in the reading of these verses. This method of reading the gospels allows the unity of Christ to be accentuated by the cross-referencing and the double reality to be stressed at the same time, which is no small feat.

38. "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."

39. Which says in part: "Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?"

40. strophe 20

41. Compare H 53.9 quoted above

Ephraem has held together in tension the two natures of Christ which he sees in the gospel accounts and has done so with a considerable lightness of touch. He seems to have tried honestly to live up to his stated desire to accept the witness of Scripture about the Son as it comes:⁴²

ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ
ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ
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"Model yourself on the Magi and treat commandments as offerings. Worship the Son as you find Him, just as he is revealed to you."

Rather than assuming a superiority over the Revelation and so a freedom to treat it as seriously as he chooses, an idea Ephraem dislikes enough to cite the rather grisly tale of Uzzah⁴³ as an example of the proper end of those who put themselves forward unduly in the course of their dealings with the Almighty, Ephraem is satisfied by this more reticent approach to Scripture. He has been able to grant seriousness to verses attributing both weakness and power to Christ and to make them fit into a consistent framework he can articulate clearly. The accomplishment of this is something of a *tour de force*.

If we set aside the greater fulness of Ephraem's description of his use of Scripture as a result of the much greater size of his works which are included in this study and take into account the very different circumstances of composition, the outlines of the two authors' approaches to Scripture show a great deal of similarity:

Both allow for the use of grammar in their reading of texts.

Both advocate the comparison of obscure texts with other verses from Scripture as a means of elucidation (thus both are

42. S. 6.123-126.

43. 2 Samuel 6:6 in H. 8.10. This is a shocking story which one would not expect to be put forward as an example of proper treatment of a worshipper by God.

advocates of the unified nature of the scriptural revelation, what Hanson calls its (*skopos*).

Both insist that Scripture is the center and seat of our knowledge of God, yet both declare that Scripture works in concert with other things to communicate its full meaning. Gregory advocates the use of human reason to express the scriptural truth in a cogent form which can withstand the attacks of the Arians, and Ephraem emphasizes the value of observing nature as an accompaniment to the study of Scripture. Thus does the human mind, at work on the *skopos* of Scripture or at work on the nature of God as revealed through the physical creation, act to clarify the content of Scripture itself. These ideas do not impinge upon the sufficiency of Scripture, but rather aim to make up for the insufficiency of human nature *vis à vis* Scripture.

Both writers advocate a process of double or distributive attribution of christological verses in Scripture to either the human or divine nature in Christ. The importance of this operation to their ability to treat cogently all christological verses is shown by the fact that they describe the method as well as use it.

Both writers believe in the growing perfection in the Revelation over time. Gregory sees the Trinity more and more fully revealed from the Old Testament to the New and then to the life of the Church, while Ephraem sees the removal of old commandments by new ones which take precedence. Each of these shows an improving Revelation leading a faithful people to improve themselves.

Still, there is not an identity in the use of Scripture by the two writers. Ephraem is much more bound to the vocabulary of Scripture than Gregory and makes use of Scripture for examples of obedient and disobedient behavior much more than Gregory, who sees in the various groups in the people of Israel at Sinai different sorts of theologians rather than different sorts of Christians. Still, the motives of the two, as well as their methods, seem very much in parallel. The writers' Christology controls their exegesis of crucial verses and does so in the same way, which seems an argument for concluding that the double attribution method of exegesis may

be the logical result of belief in a fully divine Son. They both wish to read Scripture as a unified whole rather than as a collection of parts. This also seems to be a method of smoothing over rough spots in the Revelation. If we contrast this with the Arian penchant for "atomistic" exegesis we are struck by how the two different frameworks have spawned different systems of approach. The Arians wish to work on each verse in a vacuum, thus allowing their method of linguistic analysis free reign, while the pro-Nicenes wish to hem in the process of interpretation with all the constraints concomitant with working in the midst of a sea of well-known traditional interpretations.⁴⁴ It is hard to escape the conclusion that the pro-Nicenes expect aid from this common Christian inheritance while the Arians expect interference.

Having taken a brief look at the methods of use of Scripture of our two subjects, the next step is to examine the amount and breadth of Scripture they actually use in the works in question.

44. It is terribly difficult to prove the validity of broad generalities without rehearsing reams of evidence to back even the simplest point. As further support for the correctness of this general distinction between the Arian tendency toward isolating suggests of Scripture and the Nicene tendency to treat verses of Scripture in contact with other verses (admitting that they also often isolated Scraps of Scripture in using them), one may recall this quotation from H. E. W. Turner, (1954) p. 43, "It was the heretics that relied most on isolated texts and the catholics who paid more attention on the whole to scriptural principles."

CHAPTER III

CHOICE OF SCRIPTURE

To discover how broad is the range of scriptural texts actually used by Gregory and Ephraem is the next step. Are they reacting to the use of Scripture by the Arians which they echo in these two sets of writings, are they reaching beyond the bounds of these particular Arian arguments to bring in other traditional pro-Nicene citations, or they even discovering new texts which were not usually thought relevant to the controversy?

Any successful public debator must take some account of the points and proofs offered by the other side, even if only not to appear unable to do so. Every debator must offer tangible points of his own to give substance to his position. We will see that whether Gregory and Ephraem attempt to enlarge the debate depends on whether it suits their ideas of fittingness and necessity with regard to the particular matters at hand. That is they will extend the bounds of the discussion if they feel it necessary to do so to maintain the full strength of their position or if they feel that the dignity of the divine requires support that only an extended discussion can provide. This focused approach to the argument which resists the temptation to stray into a more systematic and comprehensive treatment of Scripture reflects the usual form of these works designed to instruct in the midst of worship and the particular purpose for which their authors undertook to produce them. We are reminded again that we can understand these writings properly only in the context of their production and delivery.

Gregory's use of scriptural texts in the course of his argument will be treated first. Gregory likes to pile up texts which prove his points: obviously this is a rhetorical technique, as the parade of familiar quotations would have great force for an audience hearing them roll from an orator's tongue. One of his chief convictions:—that the thrust of Scripture in general, its

skopos, is all against the Arians,—is given practical polemical form by these torrents of verses which seem to sweep away all that would stand in their way. Or. 29.17 and Or. 30.20 provide catalogues meant to prove Christ's divinity, Or. 30.19 a list of titles of God in Scripture to see the groundwork for argument, and Or. 31.29 a catalogue of proofs of the divinity of the Spirit meant to show that the actions of the Spirit are the actions of God. The details of these lists are not as important for this point as the fact that Gregory uses this technique when he wishes to lay a groundwork for his argument. These lists are meant to serve as epitomes of the mind of Scripture. They are set forth as clear evidence of its natural pro-Nicene bent.

There are other sorts of extended passages based on expositions of Scripture in Gregory's orations, too: in Oration 30 Gregory explains in serial fashion and more extensively some key texts.¹ Interspersed in these sections lie discussions of the proper reading of 'until'², how Christ takes on human weaknesses and shortcomings in order to conquer them,³ as well as the discussions of the uses of *dunamai* mentioned above. The bulk of this oration is an argument against the Arian treatment of Scripture. The tone of the oration leads Kopecek⁴ to posit that during this oration Gregory is working his way through a *catena* of Arian proof texts. After spending Oration 29 on a more extended and, in some ways, more philosophically theological argument against the Arian positions, Gregory moves in Oration 30 to attack their exegesis. Because he is preaching in a city largely controlled by Arians and those friendly to them, and because he is attempting to put his own ideas forward in an already on-going debate, Gregory's use of Scripture in this instance is, to some degree, necessarily controlled by that of his opponents. In order to be heard at all he must address what the congregation is used to hearing.

1. These are: Or. 30.2 *Prov.* 8:22, Or. 30.7 *Jn.* 14:28 + 20:17, Or. 30.10 *Jn.* 5:19, Or. 30.12 *Jn.* 6:38, Or. 30.13 *Jn.* 17:3 *Mk.* 10:18 (*Lk.* 18:19), Or. 30.14 *Heb.* 7:25, Or. 30.15 *Mk.* 13:32.

2. Or. 30.4.

3. Or. 30.5, which thus treats a number of texts at once, (*Gal.* 3:13, *Jn.* 1:29, 2 *Cor.* 5:21 and cf. *Heb.* 2:18 in sec. 6), while also trying to take away a central Arian arguing point: that Christ is subject to human limitations and so cannot be fully divine.

4. (1979) p. 502.

Beyond this string of extended expositions, Gregory provides two catalogues of pro-Nicene texts designed to buttress the Son's full divinity: Or. 29.17 and Or. 30.20, mentioned above. The verses cited in these extended lists are all occurrences of words or phrases which Gregory feels require the existence of a fully divine Son to explain them.⁵ The contents of the two lists are as follows: Or. 29.17 contains: *Jn* 1:1, *Ps* 109:3, *Is* 41:4, *Jn* 1:18, *Jn* 14:6, *Jn* 8:12, *I Cor* 1:24, *Heb* 1:3, *Wis* 7:26, *Jn* 6:27, *Gen* 19:24, *Ps* 44:7 and *Rev* 1:8. The list of verses from which Gregory plucks attributes of the Son in Or. 30.20 is as follows: *Jn* 1:18, *Jn* 1:1, *Jn* 14:9, *I Cor* 1:30, *Eph* 5:9, *Jn* 14:6, *Col* 1:15, *Jn* 8:12 (or 9.5), *Jn* 14:6, *I Cor* 1:30, and *Jn* 11:25.⁶ This second list gives the verses in which Gregory finds words applied to the Son which he thinks indicate full divinity. It is not a list of verses he interprets so much as a list of his sources for significant words, since many of these references are evidence of nothing more than the appearance of the word in question. It is not fair to say that this is illegitimate exegesis, but this passage is surely not an example of the fully developed interpretation of Scripture. The technique Gregory is using here is to refer to catch words that his audience would already be familiar with in this context and which had been discussed sufficiently during the Arian Controversy to need only to be mentioned to have their impact. By calling to mind titles such as 'Son', 'Word' and 'Wisdom' Gregory could recall a whole line of argument in support of the full divinity of the Son without being required to rehearse all its details.⁷ These two lists

5. N.B. the use of *Is*. 41:4 in Or. 29.17 of which Mason (1899), ad loc., knows no parallel. This is an oddity which Gregory offers without explanation. We should not hope to fathom his reading of the verse without some help from him, so it must remain obscure. It is not treated in this study.

6. I have not listed all the verses Gallay (1978) gives at the bottom of these pages of his text, but only those that provide him with the titles he seeks. There are others given that did not ring in my ears as references despite the fact that they share a word with Gregory's argument here. The identification of allusions to Scripture in Christian literature is often a delicate matter. I cannot say that my estimation is correct and Gallay's is not, but I think the list that is left is sufficient for the point at hand. The task of an editor and a commentator are different and, I think, the difference provides enough excuse for me to be a bit more cautious in this regard than Gallay.

7. The same sort of argument is used in Or. 31.29 where Gregory provides 64

show some over-lap but are not identical. Gregory appears to have more than one list of significant verses in his head, or in his notes, and to use them as he thinks best. These two lists can serve as evidence of some breadth of reference in Scripture, though the manner of his use of Scripture is not one much used today. A theologian of our time would be unlikely to scatter references to Scripture without explaining the relevance of each and defending its use. The preponderance of citations of the New Testament should not be surprising, as this catalogue method works by recalling the most obvious and powerful examples rather than by breaking new and difficult ground in exegesis.

The Arian catalogues Gregory provides work in the same way:⁸ Or. 29.18 has: *Jn* 20:17, *Jn* 14:28, *Prov* 8:22, *Acts* 2:36, *Jn* 10:36, *Is* 49:3 + 5, *Phil* 2:8, *Jn* 18:9, *Jn* 15:15, *Jn* 10:18, *Jn* 9:4 *Jn* 5:19, *Jn* 12:49, *Jn* 8:15, *Mk* 10:40, *Mtt* 26:39, *Mtt* 24:36, *Lk* 2:51, *Lk* 6:12, *Lk* 2:46, *Lk* 2:52, *Mtt* 8:24, *Mtt* 4:2, *Jn* 4:6, *Jn* 11:35, and *Mk* 14:33. These are all instances of statements of subordination or dependence of the Son on the Father or instances of human actions and attribute being credited to Christ. The three citations of the second chapter of *Luke* are a good indication of how the Arians were reading the Gospels. They have used these verses from the infancy narrative in *Luke* to support their contention that the person who underwent these experiences must have been less than fully divine. Gregory has told us that he would merely attribute them to the human nature in Christ. The aim is to list texts which demand of the Son and Christ a divinity less-than-fully-equal to that of the Father. The catalogue in Oration 30 is composed of central texts in order from one through ten, counted off by Gregory as he goes, one of these is supported by a number of other references in parallel made in passing by Gregory who sees in them the same difficulty as is raised in the main list. The main list is: 1) *Prov* 8:22, 2) *I Cor* 15:25 and *Acts* 3:21, 3) *Jn* 14:28, 4) *Jn* 20:17, 5) *Jn* 5:26, *Jn* 5:27, *Ps* 2:8, *Jn* 17:2, *Rve* 5:12 *Jn* 17:6) 6) *Jn* 5:19, 7) *Jn* 6:38, 8) *Jn* 17:3 and *Lk* 18:19, 9) *Heb* 7.25, 10, *Mk* 13:32. The subsidiaries and parallel are: *I Cor* 15:28, *Heb* 5:8, *Heb* 5:/ which Gregory takes to be along the same line as the texts

quick mentions of actions of the Holy Spirit which, he thinks, should support its full divinity.

8. Or. 29.18 and throughout Oration 30.

of number two. As with the pro-Nicene catalogues, these two show some overlap but are not identical. Indeed, they show a larger number of different texts between them than Gregory lists in his counter catalogues, though this is surely not a sign of weakness in his eyes, or we might presume that he would either omit some of the points the Arians put forward or discover a few more of his own.

The catalogue in Or. 29.17, as Norris⁹ says “[reflects] Athanasius’ refutation of Arius and Basil’s attack on Eunomius”, that is, it depends on Athanasius for its choice of ammunition. Gregory meet these Arian *catenae* with his exegetical method rather than by overturning them through denial that they apply to the Son or denial that they say what they appear to say. It is important to realize that the three passages of Gregory offered in Chapter 2 as descriptions of his exegetical method were all put forward in the company of the Arian texts: the longest one comes just after the flurry of Arian citation in Or. 29.18 and the two shorter ones comes at the start of the more extended examination of the numbered list of their citations, in Or. 30.1 and Or. 30.2. Here we have perfect demonstration of the apologetic and argumentative function of exegesis in Gregory’s thought: by setting forth his principles clearly and then showing himself to be following them, Gregory is able to portray himself as countering the Arian’s strongest arguments with no need for contorted arguments. His ability to put to positive use, in strengthening the reality of the human nature, the texts which the Arians expect he will flee is a powerful debating point. We should expect that Gregory and Athanasius would make use of the same texts, as we should expect the same texts to reappear continually on the anti-Nicene side of the argument, since the question at hand is the same and the same scriptural verses provide the battle ground. The general position of each side in the Arian debate is well known to the other long before this time and the texts each uses to buttress its remarks are also well known. This is why Gregory knows so clearly which particular texts he should discuss at some length in Oration 30 and is able to provide lists of the Arian texts he considers to be

9. (1991) p. 152.

noteworthy in Orations 29 and 30.¹⁰ Gregory is not constructing new theological positions out of whole cloth, but rather trying to put them clearly and forcefully enough to sway an audience at least partly composed of hostile listeners.¹¹ The aim is to achieve plausability and comprehensiveness: all the main Arian arguments must be countered by Gregory while he has the floor, or his opponents can appear to best him later while he is absent. Gregory's description of his exegesis is effective because it takes the force out of any text the Arian might offer.

10, Norris mentions, in reference to 30.7 (1991) p. 166, that Kopecek (1979) p. 502 suggests that there were *catenae* of later Arian proof texts in circulation. Gallay, (1978) note 1, p. 212, points this out too, in relation to Or. 29.17 ff. Turner, (1954) p. 276, confidently attests the existence of *catenae* in both Greek and Latin in the Patristic period. The matter is worth a pause to consider.

Norris considers Or. 30.7 a support for this idea because the points treated here do not seem to him to lend themselves naturally to such close association as Gregory gives them, and he would explain Gregory's grouping them together by setting the arrangement of the texts one step further back into the *catenae* to which Gregory replies: yet he will not declare himself convinced of their existence. I am not so hard to convince. The use of *catenae* of texts in the ancient world was an established and widespread practice, as we would expect in an age when scrolls were too cumbersome and too expensive to make the works they contained readily available. Besides, how else could a preacher or an enthusiastic lay partisan keep the main points of contention uppermost in his mind? A *catenae* would come as a welcome help to someone without a concordance or an index. An interesting example of two interlocking *catenae* is found in Or. 29.20 where Gregory rehearses the life, death and resurrection of Christ, emphasizing throughout the paradoxes inherent in the tale. The story is told by the recital of off-setting pairs of scriptural references, very likely, to my mind, one from the Arian stable and one from the the Nicene. These quotations roll off Gregory's tongue as they would have off the tongue of any informed theologian of the time. The ammunition of both sides was well known. Gregory's art is in seizing the bolts of the enemy and claiming them for his own quiver. Is this not much more likely to have happened if there were lists of these texts available? We should not doubt the existence of *catenae*.

11. cf. Bernardi (1968), p. 368: "En tout cas, lorsque Gregoire de Nazianze inaugurait sa predication de l'Anastasia, il arrivait dans une ville ou toutes les couches de la population, depuis les eunuques du palais imperial jusqu'au petit peuple en passant par les milieux mondains, etait acquise a la arianisme... Et cela d'autant plus aisement que sa petite communaute de l'Anastasia etait elle-meme divisee. L'apollinarisme commencait a se repandre dans ces rangs, apollinarisme que Gregoire retrouvera bientot sur

Gregory shows himself to have a formidable battery of texts ready to use to support himself. Indeed, his two catalogues of texts show that he has more than one set of texts to bring to bear on the question. As long as he can provide texts requiring a high view of the Son and can counter the texts requiring a low view by adopting them for the human nature, Gregory cannot be beaten in any exegetical confrontation.

Because Gregory enters a debate in progress in these orations, he is aware of his opponents' tactics and they of his. The argument over Scripture will be won by the group which can convincingly portray itself to be in tune with the tenor of Scripture. Thus Gregory's interpretation of Scripture by Scripture could be an important factor, since it argues for a unitary view of the written revelation against one of a revelation composed of verses which are discrete pearls of wisdom set in writing. Gregory commits himself by the use of this method of interpretation by comparison to upholding a unified revelation. His use of Scripture is also important. He must treat the well-known difficulties and provide his hearers with a reason to consider his use of Scripture to be reverent and reasonable. Offering the combination of his lists and his use of a declared method of exegesis to counter his opponents' lists is his chosen plan of attack. It has the great advantage of being easily comprehensible and readily remembered.

Ephraem's use of Scripture

We should venture a few words on the range of Ephraem's use of Scripture. As we do this, though, we must realize that a small sample of an author's work cannot be expected to yield a full or balanced picture of an aspect of his thought which, like the use and selection of scriptural texts, relies so much on the particular subjects he happens to address.¹ We should make

son chemin, a son retour a Nazianze." Is it too much to think that some of Gregory's opponents of an Arian stripe might come to hear him speak, too? Snee (1981) p. 124 goes so far as to call the conditions in the church at Constantinople during Gregory's tenure "anarchical". At all events, he was not only preaching to those with his own theological opinions.

1. Dr. Richard Paul Vaggione, in a private communication of August 1990, made this point in relation to the scriptural preferences of the Neo-Arian: "Anyone who reads either Orthodox writers or their non-Nicene opponents

note of the texts Ephraem uses but should not expect the result to be definitive, given the constraints involved.²

Setting aside the many allusions to Scripture found in Ephraem's works, as in any Patristic author,³ the few texts which Ephraem uses in forming his argument which can be exactly identified fall quite readily into the category which Vaggione had suggested for them. They are of the few central Nicene proof-texts which are common to the Nicene writers. They reflect Ephraem's theological preoccupations: the divinity of Christ, the existence of plurality in the Godhead, and the incomprehensibility of God.

The divinity of Christ is buttressed by the words of the Father at the baptism of Jesus,⁴ by the confession of Peter when the apostles are challenged by Christ about their opinions of Him,⁵ and by what I take to be an implicit interpretation of *Luke* 2:52 in Hymn 32.14. There could hardly be three more standard texts for an argument over Christ's divinity than these:

cannot fail to be struck by the endless repetition of the same Scriptural passages. Particularly when dealing [with] the non-Nicene side, it becomes only too easy to think that this represents their primary or normative use of Scripture. I think nothing could be further from the truth. Most of these endlessly repeated passages (*Prov.* 8:22, *1 Cor.* 8:6, *Col.* 1:17, *Jn.* 14:28, 20:19, etc., etc.) represent those which spoke most tellingly against the Nicene position and hence are repeated ad nauseam by the Nicenes and their opponents alike. A perusal of the small amount of non-apologetic "Arian" literature which survives shows that when speaking to their own they ignored virtually all of these oft quoted texts." If this is true for what has often been considered a one issue organization, it must surely be so for the Nicene Christians.

2. It should go without saying that the same warning holds true for Gregory.
3. The reason for the comparative scarcity of scriptural references in Ephraem's writings compared to Gregory's is not that he did not keep his thought as close to Scripture or depend as much on Scripture for effect. It is, rather, at least partly the result of a different style of reference. Griffith, (1991) p. 38, says: "[Ephraem] presumes the reader knows the Bible, and that an allusion to a scriptural passage or to an incident in a biblical story will suffice to call a whole pericope to mind. So quotations from the scriptures in his works are often elliptical, with the expectation that several key words will suffice for the total recall of a passage." Many of his references are obscure to us, or lost altogether. Only the certain ones are treated here.
4. *Matt.* 3:17 in H 65.13.6
5. *Matt.* 16:16 in S 2.101: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

a sure sign that Ephraem is exchanging heavy blows with opponents. He knows that this matter of the divine sonship and the identification of Christ with God is the crux of the matter and so addresses it with the words of God Himself,⁶ the confession of Peter, the symbol of the faithful Church, and an argument designed to appropriate for the Nicenes one of the favorite texts of the Arians.⁷ This point is fought out strength against strength.

The existence of plurality in the Godhead is demonstrated from the book of *Genesis*. First, as has been examined in detail before, *Gen* 1:3 is presented,⁸ then it is backed up by *Gen*. 1:26⁹ and then a reference to the discussion before God's descent to destroy the Tower of Babel at *Gen*. 11:7 finishes off the string.¹⁰ Against what some at the time¹¹ would have liked to teach, the plurality of God is shown to be an eternal truth rather than a later development or manifestation, by the fact that it is demonstrated to be true at the very beginning of all time. Thus is use of *Genesis* doubly effective: it argues for both sides of Ephraem's point at once: the plurality in the divine explicitly, and the eternality of the plurality implicitly.

The incomprehensibility of God is presented through *Isaiah*, a book of singular power of expression and so of singular authority. *Isaiah* 45:9¹² puts forward the familiar warning against the clay speaking against the potter who moulds it and *Isaiah* 53:8¹³ is taken to deny this sort of speaking against the Son, in particular. "Who will tell of His generation?" Not only is the traditional doctrine of the unknowability of God supported by

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6. at the baptism of Christ: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."
 7. *Lk* 2:52 which they loved to take as evidence of Christ's progress during His life and so of His less-than-fully-divine nature.
 8. H 6.6.5 ff.
 9. H 6.10.6
 10. H 60.12.2 "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."
 11. e. g. Marcellus of Ancyra
 12. H 29.6.5 "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the postherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?"
 13. H 5.2.8 This verse from *Isaiah* comes in the midst of what was read as a prophetic presentation of the Passion of Christ.

this second citation, but the Son is thus given the same respect and so the same essence as God in the earlier passage. By stating that he understands these particular words from *Isaiah* 53:8 to be from the mouth of the Spirit, Ephraem makes clear the authority he allows them. There could be no greater source for the inclusion of the Son in the Godhead than this third Person of the Trinity, except, perhaps, the voice of the Father Himself at the Baptism.

Ephraem shows himself to be aware of the tendency of Christians to treat certain verses of Scripture as more authoritative than the rest and does his best to see that the verses he uses are included in that select group which are accepted as fundamental revealed truths. He treats the Arian texts in this category very carefully, arguing against them at their point of impact. He does not attempt to twist them or to deny their applicability. In this he is like Gregory. Ephraem also shows his understanding of the apologetic usefulness of the method of exegesis by double attribution by his using it in concert with the Arian reading of texts which might be held to present a low picture of Christ.¹⁴ The contrast is clearly meant to cement in the mind of the listener the difference in results offered by the two systems. Ephraem, like Gregory, is content to present the contrast and let it stand as its own best defense.

Because of the different, less academic nature of Ephraem's hymns and sermons, they do not present the same number of proof texts as do Gregory's orations. Ephraem's custom of drawing examples of good and bad behaviour from the Scriptures, even as a method of theological argument, reduces the number of times that he feels it necessary to confront an Arian point with a pointed quotation. The texts he does put forward in this way are: *Mtt* 16:16 in S 2.102, *Is* 53:8 in H 5.2, *Is* 45:9 in H 29.6, *Gen* 11:7 in H 60.12, *Mtt* 3:17 in H 65.13, and *Mtt* 11:27 in H 77.11. Apparently, Ephraem only presents two Arian quotations of Scripture: *Prov* 8:22 in H 53.10 and *Mk* 13:32 in H 77.1. Both of these Arian texts appear in Gregory's orations in the mouth of the opposition. Ephraem's own few texts are not so much in

14. H 54.8 where the strophe begins with Ephraem's reading of the text and then continues with that of the Arians.

parallel with Gregory's, though: of the six we have listed, only three appear in Gregory's orations. The other three: *Mtt* 16:16, *Gen* 11:7 and *Mtt* 3:17 are not found in the scriptural index of Gallay's text. *Mtt* 3:17 is from the description of the baptism of Jesus and makes use of the voice of the Father from Heaven to claim full sonship for Christ, *Mtt* 16:16 is the famous confession of Peter in response to Jesus' asking His disciples what people are saying about Him; these are not surprising passages for a pro-Nicene to present. The last, *Gen* 11:7 is from the story of the Tower of the Babel: "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." This is taken by Ephraem to show the existence of the Son before the Incarnation, for who else could the Father be talking to?¹⁵ Though this is not a text used in common with Gregory, it is easy to see its attraction for someone wishing to posit an eternally-existing Son. An exegete reading the Scripture with pro-Nicene eyes can come up with no end of texts to support his position. We should not be surprised if Ephraem, who worked a great deal on Scripture, as his commentaries attest, has discovered a few that are not on the tips of other people's tongues. The remarkable thing is that, in the midst of the myriad of possibilities, so many of the few texts, he presents are shared with Gregory. The Arian choice of texts, at least as they are reflected in these two of their opponents, was either more circumscribed or more consistent than their opponents'. At all events, much the same few texts stuck in Gregory's mind as did in Ephraem's.

Ephraem has presented these Nicene proof-texts with a conviction of their decisiveness, which he shared with Gregory. Each of these writers clearly expects that virtually everyone who compares his choices of scriptural texts with those of his opponents will accept his as preferable.

This chapter has shown that Gregory's argument makes use of many more references to Scripture than does Ephraem's. Gregory likes to build up strings of citations to counter the Arian *catenae* which he also provides. We can thus be sure that Gregory's

15. Remember that above in Chapter II, we have seen this sort of reasoning reflected in H 6.9.

audience had a certain degree of familiarity with these texts and their use in the controversy up to that point. Gregory also argues specific points of exegesis at length, indeed, the whole of the Fourth Theological Oration is an argument over the understanding of central Arian texts. Ephraem does not use Scripture in the same way. Though his method of exegesis of christological verses is the same as Gregory's, he does not make the same use of it in argumentation as Gregory, despite showing in Hymn 77.11 that he is capable of this. Ephraem also uses the familiar reference to the potter/clay contrast in *Is* 45:9 which Gregory uses. These are brief evidences that Ephraem is aware of this sort of argument and its usual contents. Why does he produce such different use of Scripture, then, and why are so few texts explicitly mentioned? It is most likely at least partly the result of the differences between the literary genres in which the two authors worked.

It has been quite evident that Ephraem prefers to argue over principles in his own way. He likes to make use of the examples available in Scripture of right and wrong behaviour rather than to pick proof texts to specify the behaviour in the form of commands. It is clear that Ephraem produces these hymns and sermons in large part because of the Arian controversy, yet he tends not to attack the opposition explicitly as does Gregory. It may be that Ephraem felt that corporate services of worship were not the place to enter into contention with his opponents (it is clear that he abhorred divisions in the Church), or he may have felt that by arguing positive principles rather than replying to his opponents' points he could make a more lasting impression on the congregation. However these things are decided, the congruences between the use of Scripture in the two writers show that they read the pertinent verses in the same manner and had the same confidence in the power of their method to persuade. The fact that they argued so differently, then, is likely to be the result of the differences in their opinions on the proper use of the time of worship (our knowledge of Syrian liturgical practice at this time is very thin), or their different sense of what would appeal to their listeners and stick in their minds.¹⁶ Different preachers tend always to say the same

16. The traditional approaches of the two authors were doubtless partly the result of the particular traditions of each culture and partly a response to

things in different ways; judging why they differ is a slippery business.

Excursus

In this regard the following from Brock (1990), pp. 40–41, is instructive: “The difference between these two approaches Hellenic and Semitic, can be well illustrated if one visualizes a circle with a point in the center, where the point represents the object of theological enquiry; the philosophical tradition of theology will seek to define, to set *horoi*, ‘boundaries’ or ‘definitions’, to this central point, whereas St. Ephrem’s Semitic approach through his poetry will provide a series of paradoxical statements situated as it were at opposite points on the circumference of the circle: the central point is left undefined, but something of its nature can be inferred by joining up the various points around the circumference. St. Ephraem is always very insistent that, since the center point representing the aspect of God’s being under discussion stands outside creation, it thus lies beyond the ability of the created intellect to comprehend—and any claim to be able to do so is blasphemous. In all this St. Ephraem is obviously very much in harmony with the apophatic tradition of later Greek theology.”

The differences in approach between the two writers may be as much those of culture as of literary genre. The difference between writing an oration to be delivered in an imperial capitol and writing a hymn to be sung at a noonday prayer service in Edessa must be considered, as well. Each of these writers was successful because of his highly developed ability to match his work’s tone and content to its occasion and audience. The relative importance of these varying factors is not recoverable by scholarship at present.

For example: one can safely say the following: there is a difference in the manner of presentation and the method of argument between Gregory’s orations and Ephraem’s hymns and sermons. On that point all agree. This difference can be attributed primarily to any of the following causes: a difference

what the people of that particular culture found convincing and evocative, if these things can be separated at all. See the end of the chapter for a short *excurses* on this question.

in their educational backgrounds, a difference in the literary genres in which they worked, a difference in their opinions of the best way to convince their particular audiences, or a difference in their understanding of the opponents against whom they argued. The following questions must be considered if one attempts to choose among the possibilities. If one admits that Ephraem produced his works in the manner he did because of the culture in which he functioned, as Brock seems to do, does this require that one assert that his education was Semitic and not along the classical lines of Gregory's? If one admits that the literary genres involved required different products of the authors, does that mean that they could not have chosen other genres, instead? (As we will see later in the next chapter, Ephraem is capable of the same sort of densely-packed, well-balanced propositional theology as Gregory makes use of in part of the orations. S 2.593ff. is given below as an example of this). This is an indication that it is not possible to infer from what we have before us what these writers were able to produce. We know only what has survived of what they *did* produce. Ephraem was not unable to stretch to use other discourse characteristic of other genres, are we then to say that he was not able to produce work in these other genres? It seems more reasonable to say that he chose to write as he did.

The Semitic/Hellenistic dichotomy may be one not so much of abilities as of preferences. Gregory was forced to meet his opponents through orations, it seems, but was Ephraem required to use hymnography or rhythmic prose? We cannot know. It is not beyond the bounds of reason to admit that Ephraem might have addressed these questions in orations if he had chosen to do so.

This brings us to the next point: Gregory was forced to produce orations by the culturally-based expectations of the audiences of Constantinople. Orations were the recognized vehicle of serious discourse, both religious and secular, in the Greek world. Does the state of our knowledge put us in a position to assume that they did not offer a real alternative to hymnography for Ephraem? There are no extant collections of Syriac orations from Ephraem's time or earlier. This does not mean that orations were not delivered, but only that we do not have any to read. If one presumes that Ephraem wished to succeed in his arguments

against the Arians, one must presume that he thought hymns and rhythmic sermons his best tools. Does this choice reflect a different assessment of the Arians by Ephraem than by Gregory?

For example: though Ephraem uses less Scripture in his arguments than Gregory, there are traces of evidence to suggest that he was aware of specific examples of Arian exegesis of Scripture. Why, then, does he counter it so differently from Gregory's floods of citations? Is this a reflection of the constraints of his chosen literary genre, or of the attention-span or education of his audience, or of what he thought to be the strong points in the Arian position? Because Ephraem does not tell us, we cannot know. We are not able to decide the varying importance of these possible influences on these authors. (Even to demonstrate the greater influence of classical rhetoric and philosophy on Gregory than Ephraem, something which, it is generally agreed (e. g. Brock quoted above) we are able to do, would require a monograph of its own). Brock's opinion quoted above is valuable because it is the distilled result of years of study and reflection. In an area in which so little is subject to proof, weight must be given to responsible informed opinion—always with the reservation that these reflections on the reasons for logistical choices by ancient authors take place in an almost complete vacuum of information. Once one has considered the possibilities, one has moved into the realm of conjecture and will gain little of certain value from further effort.

CHAPTER IV

THEOLOGICAL VOCABULARY

This chapter will demonstrate the differences and similarities between these two writers' theological methods. It will become clear as the comparison progresses that, though there are, indeed, many points at which the general trends of their approaches diverge, both writer to engage in the statement of direct, concise theological conclusions. Ephraem will be shown to be as aware of the import and detail of what he wishes to say as Gregory and to be just as capable of stating it clearly without resorting to images, if he desires to do so. The real contrast is in how these writers choose to express their thoughts, not in how they are able to express their thoughts.

An examination of Gregory's theological vocabulary should begin with the words he uses for God, for the divine as such, to set the background before embarking on those areas of primary conflict with his opponents. As one would expect, Gregory, in this area at least, is in substantial agreement with his opponents.

Even the few orations being studied yield a large enough crop of examples to show something of the breadth of expression Gregory thought allowable in speaking of the divine nature and its place in the cosmos:

Like all Greek theologians, pagan and Christian alike,¹ Gregory emphasized the primary rank of the divinity, calling it

1. A small sampling of precedent will serve to illustrate the breadth of support for these commonplace assertions: Eusebius in his *Demonstration of the Gospel* 5.6 quotes *Isaiah* 48:12-16 which begins: "I am first...." as indicative of a basic truth about Him. Sallustius (1926) p. 10.14 (sec. v) states as an aphorism: "It is fitting for the First Cause to be one....". Aristotle, contrasting the incorrect views of earlier Greek philosophers with his own says, in *Metaphysics* 986a, of the Pythagoreans that they considered: "numbers [to be] first of all nature (*phusis*)...." Philo, weighing in on the part of those Jews who were extremely Hellenized, calls God the "Cause"

'the primary nature'², 'the primary cause'³, 'the primary light'⁴, and 'the primary good'⁵. Also under this category can be considered the title of the Godhead 'sole-ruling'⁶, which Norris⁷ thinks to be an echo of Plotinus. Gregory stresses the unchangeability of the divine: 'unmixed nature'⁸, 'unchangeable nature'⁹ and 'indissoluble nature'¹⁰, as well as its infinity: 'incomprehensible and ungraspable nature'¹¹, 'boundless, unconfined, formless, intangible, invisible'¹² and, perhaps most decidedly 'the unnameable divine'¹³. This may seem like a great deal to say about the divine for someone who is claiming not to be able to plumb

in *Legum Allegoriarum* 3.206. Proclus (1971) takes as his eleventh proposition: "Everything that exists comes from one cause—the first". His twelfth proposition is: "The beginning of all things that are and the First Cause is the Good." Thus, the Good equals the first Cause. This parallels Gregory's calling God "the first good". In discussing his 119th proposition, Proclus says [(1971) p. 104 20–21]: "Since the first is one and good—for if it is one it is good, and if it is good, it is one..." N.B. the connection of primacy, singularity and goodness which this pagan of the early fifth century holds as self-evident and needing only to be stated. This connection was current through out the later antique period as a basic assumption held in common by pagans and Christians. Polytheism, insofar as it survived so late, was current only among those of less education who had not partaken of these philosophical speculations meant to give more coherence and respectability to the old stories of the gods found in the traditional literature. In these common phrases, and many others like them in vogue among the educated, Gregory could state basic assumptions about the nature of the divine without worrying about contradiction. For a study of Gregory's use of philosophy in these orations and his reaction to its use by his opponents, see Norris (1984) *passim*.

2. Or. 28.13 e. g. cf. Ephraem H. 55.10.2 for the Syriac equivalent: ܠܐܝܠܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ which Beck (1949) p. 9 notes as a phrase in parallel with the debate between Eunomius and Gregory Nyssa.

3. *idem*
4. Or. 28.31
5. Or. 30.13
6. Or. 29.2
7. (1991) p. 134
8. Or. 28.3
9. Or. 30.16
10. Or. 30.17.8
11. Or. 28.5
12. Or. 28.7
13. Or. 30.17

the depths of the mystery, but in the fourth century these were generally agreed upon logical necessities for the nature of the source and creator of all. Thus far Gregory has put forward nothing which will be at issue in his arguments against the neo-Arians. In fact, in Oration 28.9, Gregory is able to accept with approval the following impressive string of adjectives describing the divine nature: "ingenerate, without beginning, unchangeable, incorruptible" which the Arians had put forward,¹⁴ only to dismiss them with the aside that they add up to nothing more than the claim that God is 'incorporeal', perhaps the most commonplace of all late antique assertions about divinity. Gregory feels that the Arians do not hold to this principle firmly enough, letting themselves be led astray by their unduly rigid ideas about what the generation of the Son must entail:¹⁵

"Throw aside your 'flows' and your 'divisions' and loppings off, as well as your thinking of the incorporeal nature as if it were a body, and you may, perhaps, reflect appropriately on the generation of God."

14. "ingenerate" appears often in Eunomius, e. g. *Apol.* 7.11 (1987) p. 40, *Ex. Fid.* 3.30 (1987) p. 154 where there is a contrast drawn between Father and Son: the Son cannot be unbegotten too because that is the property of the Pantocrator. Harnack, (1903) vol. IV p.7 not 1, notes the logical parallel between Aristotle's unmoved mover and the "ingenerateness" of the neo-Arians. The one determining characteristic which sets off the divine from all else is its role as the cause of all. The defining term for that divine cause is "the Unbegotten" for the neo-Arians and "the Unmoved Mover" for Aristotle. From that point of view, the two terms are equivalent. Without our seeking to claim the neo-Arians as Aristotelians, this comparison may be kept as enlightening. "Without beginning" appears in *Apol.* 23.6 (1987) p. 62 of the divine essence; in *Ex. Fid.* 3.5. (1987) p. 152 it is denied to the Son on the strength of *Prov.* 8:22 and *John* 1:1. The contrast implied in that makes clear how strong the connection between this quality and divinity is in Eunomius' mind. "Incorruptible" is claimed at *Apol.* 9.9 (1987) p. 44 as something that could be lost to the divine if begetting in God involves division. In *Ex. Fid.* 2.17 (1987) p. 152, addressing the difficulty the other way around, Eunomius claims this quality for the divine as evidence that God does *not* divide His essence in begetting nor does the Father become the Son also at the begetting, through the division or extension of its essence to a second Person.

15. Or. 29.8

On this point Gregory finds fault with the Arians because they are not holding to the traditional first principles firmly enough.

Gregory's differences with the Arians on the proper way of speaking about the divinity come down to this point: which terms refer to the divine nature as such and which refer to the Persons of the Godhead insofar as they differ? That is to say: both sides agree on the proper way to speak about the divine nature and both hold to the traditional, philosophically based picture of God as the First Principle: the perfect, simple, changeless, infinite creator. The disagreement lies in what the Church says about God as the divine nature as opposed to what it says of God as Father, Son or Spirit.

In Or. 30.19 Gregory offers a list of scriptural texts which are meant to describe the power and acts of God in brief compass. His aim in doing this is to claim that these constitute the names which are common to all three Persons of God. Gregory wishes to draw the line around the Godhead broadly enough to include Son and Spirit and to hold that their differences with each other and the Father lie on the personal, not the essential level. Likewise, in Or. 31.17, Gregory denies the validity of assigning sex to the divine because of the grammatical gender of the words used to speak about it. Both of these arguments are crucial to an understanding of Gregory's speech about God and what he means by it, because both put explicit limits on the applicability of theological speech. Not everything that can be said about God is applicable to all the Godhead in every instance and in every way it can be applied.¹⁶ At present it is only necessary to make clear the warning that, when Gregory speaks about God, he is quite explicit that he means what he says *only* in the way that he says it. His use of theological language is much more particularized than that of the Arians who do not demand such safeguards, except when employing their principle of homonyms.¹⁷ Having reviewed his idea of the terms used in common of the divine Persons, the next step is to discover how Gregory expresses the differentiation within the Godhead, particularly that of the Son from the Father.

16. This will be treated more fully below.

17. cf. Or. 29.13.

Gregory is careful to make clear that when he speaks of different Persons within the Godhead he is not attempting to create a picture of a multiplicity of divine natures, as the Arians would characterize his position: "Father" is not the name of an 'essence' or an 'energy' but rather of the 'arrangement' between the Father and the other two persons.¹⁸ This distinction is explained a bit more fully in the last oration when Gregory is asserting that it is not a lack of anything that makes the Spirit differ from the Son:¹⁹

"We do not say that He [the Spirit] is lacking, for God is not lacking. But rather it is that the difference of their arrangement toward each other, if I may speak this way, has produced the difference in their manifestation and names."

Thus he is able to claim a contrast between 'the begetting of God' and 'creation'²⁰, because the former applies within the essence of God and the latter outside. The latter is indication of a difference of essence while the former is merely evidence of a difference of how each Person makes Himself known to us. This begetting is characterized as:²¹ 'as of something taking its existence from there timelessly and without cause', which is a very different thing from any usual picture of creation. Gregory is admitting the Father to be the source of the Son, but not His maker.

Gregory's treatment of the incarnate Christ is of particular interest, as the great difficulty of the Nicene position has always been the intelligible expression of Christ as an individual involving both the fully-divine and the human. On this extremely delicate question, the Christian writer must tread very lightly. Gregory here enjoys the aid of his position that human language is unable adequately to express divine mysteries. He can draw the outlines of what must be the facts of the case but need not feel himself under the obligation, which so beset the neo-Arians, of drawing an absolutely complete, coherent picture. Gregory is willing to differentiate the human nature in Christ

18. Or. 29.16.

19. Or. 31.9.

20. Or. 27.6

21. Or. 30.11

from the divine as *sunthelos* 'the thing put together' and *theōtēs* 'divinity' or *sunthelos* and *kreittlōn phusis* 'more powerful nature'.²² He can also call it the new Adam or the 'God made able to suffer because of sins'.²³ The divinity can be called by its metaphysical title 'divinity', as noted above, or can be described by its relation to the human: 'the anointment for sins', according as Gregory is interested at the moment. Gregory can speak of the union of the two with the verb *kerannumi*²⁴ "mix, mingle" in implicit parallel to the 'mixing' of human nature with its elements of corporal and spiritual nature existing in one individual.²⁵ This is not meant to define the nature of humans or of Christ but to illumine the one by reference to the other. Gregory refers to the bewilderment of the author of Psalm 139 who proclaims his inability to understand his own nature as part of his appreciation of the greatness of God's knowledge and inserts the question: 'How is the immortal mingled with the mortal?', meaning that he is not able to grasp how his soul and body are joined and made one. The point is, as Norris says,²⁶ "If a person finds the obvious questions about human nature puzzling, a nature which is more open to our immediate investigation, it is odd that such a person would claim to have deep knowledge of a more complex nature."

22. Or. 29.18

23. Or. 30.1 passage may seem more appropriate for a contrast between the Son in the Godhead and the Son as incarnate. It is quite clear from the context, however, that Gregory is speaking of the proper attribution of christological verses of Scripture to the two natures of Christ. This is evidence of the fundamentally instrumental view of the Incarnation which Gregory holds. He is not thinking of these descriptions as metaphysical ones but as attempts to set straight the relation of acts to natures in Christ with the intention of guarding and illuminating the working out of our salvation. Thus he can speak of the humanity of Christ as "God made able to suffer for our sins" because that is the role played by the humanity which is uppermost in his mind as he speaks. This passage shows that Gregory is willing to extend the attributes of one nature in Christ to the other because of the union between them. The human nature is called here 'passible God'. The tangibility of the Incarnation in this view is striking and would have been scandalous to those who wanted to protect the divine from the contamination of contact with creation. The depth of Gregory's commitment to this point of view is implicit in his use of it as a principle of exegesis for christological passages of the New Testament.

24. Or. 30.3.

25. Or. 28.22.3.

26. (1991) p. 123.

Gregory does not bring forward *kerannumi* in an effort to explain the union of divine and human in Christ, since he has already declared the term unable to illuminate that union in humankind. He uses it because it must be true that there is union, and because "mixing" is a term that allows mingling without the loss of the integrity of either element. It is a declaration of a mystery, not an explanation of one. This distinction is the conclusion we should take away from this section: Gregory's choice of vocabulary to express his christological ideas is not meant as an explanation of that mystery, and certainly not as a codification of proper ways to express it, (or his variety would be self-defeating). He means, rather, to describe what he knows to be true in ways that make his point clear. Since language about the divine can only be useful within a carefully circumscribed area, it is necessary for Gregory to introduce a variety of manners of expression if more than one aspect of his idea is to be expressed. The example from Or. 30.1 noted above should serve to show that the variety of expression is driven by the function of Christ discussed in the particular context. What may at first seem lax or imprecise is actually the result of a very acute idea of the strengths and weaknesses of human language.

Gregory insists that terms are not absolute: they do not convey all the information there is about the thing they describe nor do they describe it exactly. An important example of this is seen in Or. 30.18 where Gregory maintains that 'Theos' and 'Kurios' are relational terms in their description of the divinity rather than absolute ones.²⁷ They describe the divine nature as it is in relation to us rather than as it is in itself. The only term that Gregory will accept for the Godhead as it is in itself is one from the mouth of God Himself, in *Exodus* 3:14: *ho ōn* "the one who is". This demonstrates that the fault lies not in the effort to describe things with language, but rather in the effort to describe things with human language sprung from finite human minds.²⁸ Gregory is willing to allow a description to be

27. It may help to recall Or. 30.8 where the effect of relations on the proper terms to be used is illustrated with an example interior to the Trinity.

28. This difficulty is remarked upon by Origen in reference to the description of the incarnate Christ, at *De Prin.* II.6.65-78, Sources Chretiennes no. 252, p. 312: "Cum ergo quaedam in eo ita videamus humana, ut nihil a communi mortalium fragilitate distare videantur, quaedam ita divina, qua

absolutely true if it stems from a source lofty enough. This does not mean, however, that he will feel equally respectful of all terms drawn from Scripture, since these are meant, for our finite minds and circumstances.²⁹

Gregory is not one to push aside all the virtues of language and rational thought. In Or. 29.13, he refers to the Arians' willingness to use the term 'God' of the Son, while only granting Him the name without the reality it is meant to convey: 'They admit that the Son is 'god', but only equivocally.'³⁰ This is objectionable because the Arians, instead of putting too much faith in the accuracy of words, as is their wont,³¹ instead try to evacuate all meaning from the term as they apply it to the Son. The inadequacy of language, in Gregory's eyes, does not mean that

nulli alii nisi illi primae et ineffabili nature convenient deitatis, haeret, humani intellectus angustia et tantae ammirationis stupore percussa, quo declinet, quid teneat, quo se convertat, ignorat. Si deum sentiat, mortalem videt; si nomenem putet, devicto mortis regno cum spoliis redeuntem a mortuis cernit. Propter quod cum omni metu et reverentia contemplandum est, ut in uno eodemque ita utriusque nature veritas demonstretur, ut neque aliquid indignum et indecens in divina illa et ineffabili substantia sentiatur, neque rursum quae gesta sunt falsis inlusa imaginibus aestimentur". This example of the difficulty under which theologians labor is buttressed by Origen's admission that this is an inevitable accompaniment of attempting to wrestle with such lofty topics (*De Prin.* II.7.22-95) "Oportet ergo nos scire quia paracletus est spiritus sanctus, docens maiora quam voce proferri possunt et, ut ita dixerim, quae ineffabilia sunt et quae non licet homini loqui, id est quae indicari humano sermone non possunt". We are able to know, through revelation, more than we will ever be able to express. That gap between knowledge and expression is the one that the theologian strives always to cross. Though failure is certain, making the effort is the theologian's task. Gregory was sure to know this passage from such a central work of Origen's as the *De Principiis*, though any theologian of Gregory's quality would surely discover the fact on his own. However it came to his attention, the two thinkers are at one on this point.

29. as in Or. 30.17.11 ff. below.

30. Gallay (1978) note ab loc. is worth quoting here: "Le terme grec, quand est pris dans un sens general signifie «homonyme». Mais dans la Logique d'Aristote il s'applique aux choses designees par le meme nom, tout en ayant des natures et des definitions differentes (*Categ.* la); dans ce cas, on le traduit par «equivoque». This seems to express disdainful attitude of Gregory toward this apparent concession by the Arians, so I have adopted it here.

31. cf. Or. 29.6 where concrete use of "will" by the Arians leads them to attempt to declare the Son to be the son of the will of the Father, since

it has *no* power and so can be made to mean whatever its users desire, in the manner of Humpty Dumpty. The power of language is shown when it is used within its proper sphere. To try to use it outside that sphere or to try to misuse it within its realm of competence are both offenses against its proper power. What distinguishes the Arians is the part of appropriate usage against which they offend.

Norris³² illustrates the difference between Gregory's view of language and the neo-Arian view thus: "Nazianzen's view follows Aristotle (*On Interpretation* 16A-B) who sees names established by convention, by arbitrary designation alone. The later Arians depend upon an opposite view, that names determine essence..." This dichotomy is the source of Gregory's frustration with the attempts of his opponents to stretch beyond their reach and with their demands that he do the same in order to prove his points to them. He illustrates his meaning clearly in Or. 30.17.11ff:

"No one has breathed in all the air, nor has any mind ever contained, nor any word grasped, the nature of God. Writing with shadows, we gather an image of Him from the things around Him: an image which is sometimes weak and sometimes murky. For us, the best theologian is not one who has discovered everything, since [our] bonds will not allow everything, but rather the one who can conjure up more of an image than the others and can bring together in himself a trace of the truth, or the shadow cast by the truth, or whatever we would call it."

He was begotten willingly, rather than of the Father Himself. In that case the Arians attempt to introduce another actor into divine generation by treating the Will as a concrete individual. This, which is reminiscent of a Gnostic desire to have everything mentioned in recounting the history of the divine turn out of be personal (resulting, in the Gnostic system, in their many aeons), is a characteristic misuse of language by the Arians. They liked to link their terms with objects and hold them in a firm one-to-one relationship which then offers us an "objective knowledge of reality", as Vaggione (1976), p. 223, says. See page 221 ff. of this work for a discussion of Eunomius' theory of language. This tendency makes their use of "God" as an homonym seem all the stranger, since it requires detaching the word from the object it describes. Compare also Wiles (1989) for a sympathetic assessment of the religious motive of Eunomius' theory of language.

32. (1991) p. 149.

The best theologian recognizes the limitations of his tools and uses them to do what they can. Thus his actions are positive and helpful, his omissions considered and meaningful. To attempt to make language artificially precise or artificially flexible endangers the value of the points one has made legitimately. To do both by turns, as the neo-Arians have done, throws the whole of the theological enterprise into disarray. What is the purpose of formulating theological statements when they might be meant as concrete rocks of certainly or allusive symbolic statements? How could any reader profit by wading in such murky waters? Feeling that he sees the dissolution of any sort of meaningful theological discourse staring him in the face, Gregory lashes out at the Arians in the final oration:³³

“You explain the ingenerate nature of the Father, and I will state concretely the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, and we will both be struck mad in our peeping into the mysteries of God.”

As Gregory says a few lines later:¹ we cannot: ‘...supply reason in this way to an inexpressible nature above reason’, and the attempt is illogical on its face. The Arians ask the impossible of themselves and of the language they use. An appreciation of the limitations of language is as important as the realization of its power. In Gregory’s opinion, the Arians err on both sides of the mark at various times in this discussion.

Ephraem’s Theological Method

Descriptions of the divine are always difficult to formulate. They tend to cling to generalities which are commonly accepted or particular points which are in dispute at the time. Since less is known of the Arian debate in the Syrian Church than in either the Latin or Greek language communities, Ephraem’s writings issue out of a darker background than Gregory’s. It is, therefore, of particular interest to us to observe Ephraem with this reflective tendency of argumentation in mind, as his choice of emphases will reflect the discussions then under way within the range of his awareness and may cast light on the theological debates within

33. Or. 31.8.16. ff.

1. Or. 31.8.23-4

Ephraem's immediate experience. We can attempt to discern what points were taken by his listeners as obvious truths and what as arguments on contested questions.

His most basic description of the divine as such is ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ 'incomprehensible'² of which the following is an expansion:

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

"A human being is comprehensible but there is no definition of the nature of God."

This second citation shows that Ephraem has an exact picture in his mind when he is stating this general truth about God. For him, it is not a platitude but a line of demarcation between the divine and all else, and so a necessary starting point in any theological reflection.

God is contrasted with creation in other standard descriptions of Him:³ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ "Maker, Former, Creator". These are all usual titles of God in Christian writings, though the precision with which Hymn 29.3.7-8 was written should make us aware of the relationship between God and creation here depicted. Ephraem does not read these titles in a void, but in the context of the relation of the divine to His creatures.

Like Gregory, Ephraem is not ashamed to use the image of mixing to emphasize the closeness of two things.⁵

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

² S. 1.13

³ H 29.3.7-8

⁴ e.g. S 4.13 ff.

⁵ S 1.69-72 Compare Gregory's use of "mixing" in Or. 28.22.3 to stress the multipart nature of human beings. These passages must be read strictly within their own frames of reference. Terms of mixing had not yet come to be seen as problematic in christological discussion and should not be

“On Him depend all created things since He is mingled with His Father. How will you seek the Only [-Begotten] who is mingled in the Father’s being?”

The Son is seen here as the creator and sustainer of the world. His mingling with the Father is proof of His eternality and so of the eternality of His supportive relation to creation. It also puts Him beyond the reach of the human intellect. This idea is made a bit more specific in terms of its meaning for the Godhead when, just a few lines later, Ephraem adds: ⁶

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

“He [the Son] is mingled completely with all of Him [the Father].”

The closeness and completeness of the relationship is reiterated. All things depend on the divine, but the Son is not related to the Father in that way. His mingling is the involvement of all of Himself with all of the Father, equally for each, and so is a connection of peers rather than another dependency.

The following citation reveals in Ephraem a desire to distinguish and connect the Persons at the same time. This is the pro-Nicene Trinitarian problem. The manner in which a writer attempts to express the inexpressible is very instructive as it reveals the elements of the mystery he considers central. The whole passage has been given to show something of the close-knit quality of Ephraem’s thought.⁷

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

seen as tainted here. Each age has its own concerns and must not be expected to be addressing those of other ages.

6. S 1.107

7. S. 593 ff.

simple direct statement.¹¹ The important fact he wishes to communicate is that the Persons are meant to be understood as truly existing in and of themselves and truly existing in relationship with each other. They must be whole and complete each on His own as well as in concert with each other. So, Ephraem achieves a balance by placing in the same sermon as the previous citation, which stressed the relationship between the Father and the Son, the following lines:¹²

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܒܝ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ

"The Father is complete in His essence and the First-born in His begottenness. The Father is perfect and the Son is perfect: the offspring as perfect as its begetter."

Every statement of truth requires a balancing statement of truth for the pattern to be kept intact.

It is an extremely important matter to determine what and how much Ephraem thinks he is able to communicate through the medium of human language. Ephraem himself is well aware of the central importance of this consideration and reveals an acquaintance with the central points in the question in the course of his discussion of it.¹³

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܒܝ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ

11. cf. Brock's statement, quoted above at the close of Chapter III, on the Semitic mind working around the perimeter of what it seeks to describe. I would be inclined to think that Ephraem's manner of approach here is dictated by the problem he addresses rather than by his cultural background.

12. S 2.1-4

13. S 2.621-638

1. התאחדות העובדים העצמאיים היישוביים
 2. התאחדות העובדים העצמאיים היישוביים

$\alpha \omega \alpha \Gamma \alpha \omega \quad | ; | \theta ; \quad \alpha \omega \alpha \Lambda \quad | ; | \theta ; \quad \alpha \omega \alpha \Lambda \quad | ; | \theta ;$
 $\alpha \omega \alpha \Lambda \quad | ; | \theta ;$

א.ד.ל. יצאנו לדרך ביום חמישי כ"ב אלול

אני? אולי? נח אולי? אולי? אולי?
אולי?

[illegible]

1. 9; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21; 22; 23; 24; 25; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 31; 32; 33; 34; 35; 36; 37; 38; 39; 40; 41; 42; 43; 44; 45; 46; 47; 48; 49; 50; 51; 52; 53; 54; 55; 56; 57; 58; 59; 60; 61; 62; 63; 64; 65; 66; 67; 68; 69; 70; 71; 72; 73; 74; 75; 76; 77; 78; 79; 80; 81; 82; 83; 84; 85; 86; 87; 88; 89; 90; 91; 92; 93; 94; 95; 96; 97; 98; 99; 100; 101; 102; 103; 104; 105; 106; 107; 108; 109; 110; 111; 112; 113; 114; 115; 116; 117; 118; 119; 120; 121; 122; 123; 124; 125; 126; 127; 128; 129; 130; 131; 132; 133; 134; 135; 136; 137; 138; 139; 140; 141; 142; 143; 144; 145; 146; 147; 148; 149; 150; 151; 152; 153; 154; 155; 156; 157; 158; 159; 160; 161; 162; 163; 164; 165; 166; 167; 168; 169; 170; 171; 172; 173; 174; 175; 176; 177; 178; 179; 180; 181; 182; 183; 184; 185; 186; 187; 188; 189; 190; 191; 192; 193; 194; 195; 196; 197; 198; 199; 200; 201; 202; 203; 204; 205; 206; 207; 208; 209; 210; 211; 212; 213; 214; 215; 216; 217; 218; 219; 220; 221; 222; 223; 224; 225; 226; 227; 228; 229; 230; 231; 232; 233; 234; 235; 236; 237; 238; 239; 240; 241; 242; 243; 244; 245; 246; 247; 248; 249; 250; 251; 252; 253; 254; 255; 256; 257; 258; 259; 260; 261; 262; 263; 264; 265; 266; 267; 268; 269; 270; 271; 272; 273; 274; 275; 276; 277; 278; 279; 280; 281; 282; 283; 284; 285; 286; 287; 288; 289; 290; 291; 292; 293; 294; 295; 296; 297; 298; 299; 300; 301; 302; 303; 304; 305; 306; 307; 308; 309; 310; 311; 312; 313; 314; 315; 316; 317; 318; 319; 320; 321; 322; 323; 324; 325; 326; 327; 328; 329; 330; 331; 332; 333; 334; 335; 336; 337; 338; 339; 340; 341; 342; 343; 344; 345; 346; 347; 348; 349; 350; 351; 352; 353; 354; 355; 356; 357; 358; 359; 360; 361; 362; 363; 364; 365; 366; 367; 368; 369; 370; 371; 372; 373; 374; 375; 376; 377; 378; 379; 380; 381; 382; 383; 384; 385; 386; 387; 388; 389; 390; 391; 392; 393; 394; 395; 396; 397; 398; 399; 400; 401; 402; 403; 404; 405; 406; 407; 408; 409; 410; 411; 412; 413; 414; 415; 416; 417; 418; 419; 420; 421; 422; 423; 424; 425; 426; 427; 428; 429; 430; 431; 432; 433; 434; 435; 436; 437; 438; 439; 440; 441; 442; 443; 444; 445; 446; 447; 448; 449; 450; 451; 452; 453; 454; 455; 456; 457; 458; 459; 460; 461; 462; 463; 464; 465; 466; 467; 468; 469; 470; 471; 472; 473; 474; 475; 476; 477; 478; 479; 480; 481; 482; 483; 484; 485; 486; 487; 488; 489; 490; 491; 492; 493; 494; 495; 496; 497; 498; 499; 500; 501; 502; 503; 504; 505; 506; 507; 508; 509; 510; 511; 512; 513; 514; 515; 516; 517; 518; 519; 520; 521; 522; 523; 524; 525; 526; 527; 528; 529; 530; 531; 532; 533; 534; 535; 536; 537; 538; 539; 540; 541; 542; 543; 544; 545; 546; 547; 548; 549; 550; 551; 552; 553; 554; 555; 556; 557; 558; 559; 560; 561; 562; 563; 564; 565; 566; 567; 568; 569; 570; 571; 572; 573; 574; 575; 576; 577; 578; 579; 580; 581; 582; 583; 584; 585; 586; 587; 588; 589; 590; 591; 592; 593; 594; 595; 596; 597; 598; 599; 600; 601; 602; 603; 604; 605; 606; 607; 608; 609; 610; 611; 612; 613; 614; 615; 616; 617; 618; 619; 620; 621; 622; 623; 624; 625; 626; 627; 628; 629; 630; 631; 632; 633; 634; 635; 636; 637; 638; 639; 640; 641; 642; 643; 644; 645; 646; 647; 648; 649; 650; 651; 652; 653; 654; 655; 656; 657; 658; 659; 660; 661; 662; 663; 664; 665; 666; 667; 668; 669; 670; 671; 672; 673; 674; 675; 676; 677; 678; 679; 680; 681; 682; 683; 684; 685; 686; 687; 688; 689; 690; 691; 692; 693; 694; 695; 696; 697; 698; 699; 700; 701; 702; 703; 704; 705; 706; 707; 708; 709; 710; 711; 712; 713; 714; 715; 716; 717; 718; 719; 720; 721; 722; 723; 724; 725; 726; 727; 728; 729; 730; 731; 732; 733; 734; 735; 736; 737; 738; 739; 740; 741; 742; 743; 744; 745; 746; 747; 748; 749; 750; 751; 752; 753; 754; 755; 756; 757; 758; 759; 760; 761; 762; 763; 764; 765; 766; 767; 768; 769; 770; 771; 772; 773; 774; 775; 776; 777; 778; 779; 780; 781; 782; 783; 784; 785; 786; 787; 788; 789; 790; 791; 792; 793; 794; 795; 796; 797; 798; 799; 800; 801; 802; 803; 804; 805; 806; 807; 808; 809; 810; 811; 812; 813; 814; 815; 816; 817; 818; 819; 820; 821; 822; 823; 824; 825; 826; 827; 828; 829; 830; 831; 832; 833; 834; 835; 836; 837; 838; 839; 840; 841; 842; 843; 844; 845; 84

“Though the fruit and the tree are one yet are they not one, for the fruit is known as fruit and the tree as the stock. They are mingled together in an equal affection and yet are distinguished by two names. The name ‘fruit’ is the name of the fruit alone and the name ‘tree’ is that of the stock. There are two names and two things, though they are mingled together in power and affection. If there were a name ‘fruit’ but the ‘fruit’ itself did not exist, then you would still call the tree ‘stock’ on account of the fruit which it had not brought forth. As the tree does exist, in itself as well as in name, so does the fruit, which also exists in name as well as in truth. As the fruit exists in name, so does the stock in itself.”¹⁴

This passage is meant to show how the names used of these things have real existences of their own just as the things themselves do. It is proper to call a tree 'stock' even if it is without fruit because it has the potential to bear fruit. The fruit exists at that time in its name (that is, the inherent potential represented by the name 'fruit' exists) even if it does not yet exist as an object. The two names of these things are independent of each other as well as dependent because they each carry their own true meaning which does not exist by means of the other, despite being bound to it. This interlocking

14. Beck (1981) p. 118 remarks that ~~Wald~~ means, primarily, the reality of an individual thing. It has been translated here by 'self' in an attempt to bring out this reflexive aspect.

of dependence and independence mirrors that of Father and Son and is also an illustration of the real value of those terms referring to the Godhead.

We should notice the equivalence of ܐܝܠܐܘܕ 'individual self' with ܐܝܠܐܘܕ 'true reality' in lines 636 and 638 as well as that of ܐܝܠܐܘܕ 'name, term' with ܐܝܠܐܘܕ 'true reality' in line 638. It is clear from this that Ephraem considers terms to be of real concrete value and to have an actual connection with what they describe. This is *not* to say that he believes that language is a created thing alongside the physical world; Ephraem is no nominalist, but he does believe that terms do have real referents and dependable meanings. This connection is evident in Ephraem's exhortation to take seriously what the names of the Persons tell us and to guide our belief accordingly:¹⁵

ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ
ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ
ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ
ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ ܐܝܠܐܘܕ

"You have heard 'Father', 'Son' and 'Spirit': grasp the individuals by means of the names. It was not the names that were mingled, the Three are mingled in reality. If you confess faith in their names but not in their realities, you will be a worshipper in name, but a denier in fact."

Belief in the Persons must accompany belief in the names, i. e. doctrine. To have one without the other is a denial of both.¹⁶ Ephraem holds that doctrine has real value and is connected with, and representative of, reality. It cannot be treated differently from reality. Ephraem is a firm believer in the power of language, within its limits, to convey truth.

15. S 4.45ff.

16. cf. the Arian use of homonyms, a perfect instance of belief in the name but not in the reality it expresses. Is it not against an opponent of that sort that Ephraem argues?

It is not surprising when, a hundred lines later in the same sermon, Ephraem refers to the names of the Persons as protective barriers ܠܝܥܬܐ and ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ¹⁷ to keep us out of inappropriate investigation. Consider also that Ephraem takes the reality of words seriously enough to speak of Incarnation as the Word "putting on names"¹⁸ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ , as well as using the usual vivid images of putting on the flesh¹⁹ common to virtually all Patristic authors.

A strong sense of the real value of language demands some reflection on terms used of both the divine and the created. This, of all misuses, must be the most glaring. The quotations with which we began this examination of Ephraem's theological language showed his awareness of the insurmountable gulf between the divine and the created, yet Christian tradition has always used some of the same words of God and of creation. How can language have real value when used so equivocally?²⁰

$\text{ܠܝܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ}$
 $\text{ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ}$
 $\text{ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ}$
 $\text{ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ}$
 $\text{ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ}$
 $\text{ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ}$
 $\text{ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ ܠܥܬܐܝܠܐ}$

"They are called 'gods' but He is fully God. They are called 'fathers' but He is so in truth. They are called 'spiritual' but He is the Living Spirit. 'Sons' and 'fathers' are they called, but their names are borrowed and teach by grace that there is, in truth, one Father and He has one true Son."

A general setting forth of this distinction between those properly called something and those who have their names by

17. S 4.137 and 139 respectively

18. H 31.1

19. H 4.2.11 e. g.

20. H 46.12

loan is found in Hymn 63.10. There, the true reality ܐܠܗܐ is contrasted to likeness ܕܡܝܬܐ, the thing in nature ܕܡܝܬܐ to what its title ܕܡܝܬܐ, and the true name ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ to the metaphor ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ. God is the true referent of terms which are used equivocally of both the divine and creatures and the created things are given their names by analogy with the truth in the divine. In this way, earlier in the same hymn, were 'Father' and 'Son' previously held to be terms proper to the divine which are applied analogically to creatures.²¹ Thus, the term 'father' used in connection with the divine, can be held to imply the existence of a son as well, because of the term's necessary content of truth when used of God:²²

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
 ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
 ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
 ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
 ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ
 ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ

"Who can give a reasonable account of the names of the Holy One, that He is in perfect agreement with Himself: in 'Being' to His being, in being 'Upright' with His uprightness, and in being 'Good' with His goodness. In these things is He in agreement. How could it be that His Fatherhood would be a division so that He would not be in agreement with Himself, so that he would not have a glorious Son from His own bosom?"

The words we use to speak of God have real value. They communicate real truths and cannot be pushed aside as if they were of no worth. The truth of the names of God first mentioned in the quotation sets up the pattern for us by which we see that the name 'Father' must have the same sort of value as these other names and so must be held to communicate a truth. This passage demonstrates Ephraem's conviction that we can

21. strophe 4.1-4

22. H 60.10

communicate facts about the divine through the means of human language.

We should not be misled by Ephraem's terminology. Though he speaks of the 'names' of God, this term ܡܠܟܐ 'name' does not mean only the word one pronounces when one refers to an object, his understanding of its force is broader than that and includes the reality of the object the term describes.²³ Thus Ephraem is able to make use of the way in which we speak of God by reference to these 'names' or, in H. 5. 7. 5-9 quoted in Chapter VI, he can speak of the incarnation of the Son as an exchange of names, and actually be speaking of the realities these names represent. For Ephraem, this discussion of the proper use of theological language is also a discussion of the proper appreciation of what our knowledge of God actually amounts to, since the information contained in the scriptural references to the Son both in Himself and incarnate can be considered to contain real truth.

Ephraem does not consider that the Arians are being irresponsible in that they treat language as being too concrete, but rather that they treat it as if its meaning had no real roots.²⁴

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ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
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23. cf. Beck (1981) p. 117. As Beck points out, this usage is a direct contrast to the Greek usage which would allow the 'name' of an object only to refer to the idea represented in the mind by our knowledge of an object but not to stand for the object itself. Ephraem's usage allows him to express his thoughts in an idiom not available to Greek writers.

24. H. 61.6-9.

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
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“Who would not marvel at the joining of the roots which have destroyed their natures and changed their names? Both of them are hidden from what are their fruits. The root of freedom has the fruit of slavery and the tree of slavery the appearance of greatness, since they are changing their blossoms. In this picture itself lies the tool to defend against it: if the true Son [the divine nature in Christ] is thought not to be the offspring, then is the servant [the human nature in Christ] not to be counted as a work. It must be one of the two. Either the two sides stand

firm each in his own steadfastness or they have both entered into change. Either they have loosened their names from the truth or their natures have wandered [for this sort of change to be allowed]. Who would not ask if the one He [the Father] named 'Son' was a 'creature' in His inquiry into Him but the 'creature' will also become 'Son' in the course of questioning? Since His name could not then be appropriate for Him He would cast aside the truth about Himself and flee to 'offspring', as also the name 'Son' would cleave itself to the creatures. That name 'creature' no longer being like 'creature' was before, how will 'offspring' not be like 'son' anymore? [i.e. what else could it possibly mean?] This is a great confusion. If the Son of Truth has thrown away His name and destroyed it (may that thing be far from ever happening!) who could pronounce His names uprightly since they have destroyed what is proper?"

Ephraem understands clearly that the christological claims of the pro-Nicenes crumble if they are made to function in this world where words change their meanings. Since all these traditional words have been used up to that time by the Church because of the way in which their meanings interact, if one begins to pull away at the meanings of some of them, all the rest of the previously agreed upon signposts are lost as well. Because of the delicate balance required to safeguard competing truths, an unraveling of some strands of the fabric of theological discourse destroys its pattern—the ability of the whole to convey its desired meaning. Ephraem's argument against the rearrangement of meanings he says the Arians desire is a necessary defence of the pro-Nicene theological enterprise.

It is inexcusable, in Ephraem's mind, to allow what has actual value, real content, to be treated as if it can be twisted into whatever shape suits the exigencies of the moment. Only if 'Father', 'Son', 'creature' and 'begotten' have real meaning can theological discussion take place with the hope of achieving something useful, with the writer confident that reality is being treated with a due degree of understanding of the limits it imposes on the nimbleness of the human mind.

We should note before closing that Ephraem does not deny himself the use of non-scriptural theological language or seek to limit the bounds of the discussion to scriptural terms, despite a

very strong preference for scriptural language and a deeply felt conviction that to go beyond it is inappropriate forwardness:²⁵

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"It would be rashness if we should call you by a different name than the one by which your Father called you, when He called you, alone, 'My Son', at the same time when you were baptised by the Jordan River."

Only the gravest necessity would cause Ephraem to commit an act of ܕܡܢ 'rashness', a sin which typifies his opinion of his opponents. If one is to come to an appreciation of Ephraem's thought, especially in this area of theological method, it must always be kept in mind that much of what he undertakes in the works under study he considers to be distasteful necessities forced on him because of the particular form taken by his opponents' argument. This use of extra-scriptural vocabulary by Ephraem is in no way an endorsement of it by him. Still, we see that in H 60.10, quoted above, when he lists a number of qualities proper to God which we know for certain, his list contains some that seem more philosophical than Biblical. True, 'Being' and 'upright' [ness] are certainly attributed to God in Scripture, but this still does not give the list a scriptural flavour, at least to my ear. Ephraem's strong preference for scriptural terms does not lead him to work only through *catenae* of Bible verses. His urge to counter the Arians outweighs his ideal preferences.

Ephraem's main point of methodological contention with the neo-Arians is the same as Gregory's: their use of language which detaches it from the realities it describes. It is in the relationship of language to reality that the neo-Arians and their opponents part company most clearly. Many of their basic assumptions about deity are the same. When it comes to understanding and making use of the contents of the scriptural revelation, though, the wide gulf between the two groups is at its most evident.

25. H. 51.7.1-3 I am indebted to Beck (1949) P. 65 for this reference in this context.

CHAPTER V

METHODS OF ARGUMENT

This chapter will examine the theological methods used by Gregory and Ephraem in the works under study.

Theological method, for the purpose of this inquiry, includes not only the writers' assessments of the nature of theology and its range of applicability but also their use of language, their dependence upon imagery in their argument, and their opinion of the breadth of reach attainable by the human intellect.

The examination of these writers up to this point has shown that they both considered their arguments against the Arians to spring from the very first principles governing the assumptions made about theology. This chapter, by outlining various aspects of their own theological efforts, will serve to demonstrate more fully the profiles of the theology these writers were defending. From this will be gained a better appreciation for the cause of their concern.

An attempt to understand Gregory's theological method must be placed against the background of his description of theology in Oration 27. As Norris describes Gregory's conclusions:¹ Theology is confessional and "best pursued through preaching and worship". This is not the claim of an obscurantist. The amount of time Gregory spent in acquiring a literary and philosophical education does not lead one to expect him to discount the value of intellectual inquiry into the divine. This is a claim that theology is a different sort of science, though still a science. Gregory will make use of the skills acquired during his study in his efforts to understand the divine and the scriptural revelation. He will not expect to do so, however, as an intellectual exercise

1. (1991) p. 101

apart from the life of a Christian in the Church. The peculiar nature of the subject matter of theology requires any examination of it to operate in a peculiar manner: the whole life of the enquirer is involved. Theology is a science because it operates according to rules and involves the organized use of the human intellect. It stands apart from other sciences because its subject is infinite and beyond comprehension.

The first five sections of Oration 28, with their extended application of the story of the wandering Israelites at the Mount as a metaphor for the theological quest, show clearly that Gregory understands how the variety of religious lives humans lead forms their ability to engage in and succeed at theological investigations. One of his goals in these orations to demonstrate that the Arians' approach to theology and use of language in it are inappropriate.

In Or. 29.6+7 Gregory engages in a serious attack on the Arian tendency to make language something concrete.²

"They say, 'Did the Father beget the Son willingly or unwillingly?'... They say, If it was against His will then He is being ruled. Who was doing the ruling? How was God being ruled? But if it was in accordance with His will, then the Son is the son of the Will'. Thus do they fashion the Will into a kind of new mother in the place of the Father".

Here is a passage from Eunomius which demonstrates the point to which Gregory is objecting:³

"Accordingly, if this argument has demonstrated that God's will is an action, and that this action is not essence but that the Only-begotten exists by virtue of the will of the Father, then of necessity it is not with respect to the essence but with respect to the action (which is what the will is) that the Son preserves his similarity to the Father."

That this point was considered important by those on both sides of the argument is made clear when we read this section

2. Or. 29. 6. 2-9 with some omitted

3. *Apol.* 24. 1-4 Eunomius (1987) p. 64

of Eunomius' Fragment in which argues explicitly against making the will of God identical with His essence:⁴

"...because the will and the purpose of God are not identical with his essence: the act of willing has both a beginning and an ending, while the divine essence neither begins nor ends, and it is impossible that that which begins and ends should be identical with that which has neither beginning nor ending".

These are serious concerns for Eunomius. He is anxious to protect the absolutes inherent in the divine nature, one of which is changelessness as a sign of perfection. For him, to will something is to enter a state of desiring something which you did not formerly desire, which is a sort of change, and therefore cannot be essential to the divine nature. This is not a trivial point, but Gregory thinks it stems from a misunderstanding. Gregory objects that this is a misuse of language and that the Arians are confusing different levels of reality. By treating the word 'will' in their discussion on the same level as 'son' or 'Father', the Arians are allowing mere descriptions of things to enter into a discussion of realities as if they were realities themselves. Not all things described by language are of equal realness. Gregory would place the highest level of reality in the Godhead and would not allow the created world to be treated as if it were on a par with It.⁵ He holds, in Or. 29.5, that the Father is 'father' in truth but humans are fathers only by analogy to Him. A lower level of reality resides in the objects of the created realm and only a sort of derived reality in the language used about them. This scale of being must be kept in mind to avoid confusion in the course of the discussion. Gregory picks the same hole in the Arian discussion of generacy and ingeneracy in Or. 29.10 as he does in their concretizing of the will. 'Generate' and 'Ingenerate' are descriptions rather than realities on the level of Godhead. The divinity the Father and Son share is not affected

4. Fragmentum i ll. 1-4, Eunomius (1987) p. 176

5. This error Gregory objects to is called a "category mistake" by Norris (1991), e.g. p. 141. It is an error of not distinguishing the ultimate reality of the divine from the lesser reality of all else. Norris shows that this sort of jibe by Gregory is meant to downgrade the credibility of the Arian argument by pointing out the deficiency of their education and so of their novel approach, cf. also Norris (1984) p. 459 on Gregory's disdain for the Eunomians' lack of a proper full education.

by the generate or ingenerate quality of their persons. Gregory realizes the logic behind this false identification;⁶

"If 'unbegotten' is the essence of God, then 'begotten' is not the essence."

and argues that the terms do not require differences in nature of what they describe:⁷

"How, then, do you say that the ingenerate and the generate are not the same? If you said that of the uncreated and the created, I would accept it, for what has no beginning and what has been created are not the same in nature; but this is not correctly said of the begetter and the begotten. It is entirely necessary that *they* should be the same in nature. For it is the nature of the begetter and the begotten that [the begotten] should be the same in nature as the begetter."

The real difficulty is that the rigid use of language and the attempt to make it wholly rational are both unsuited to theology.⁸ We can see the difficulty these bring in their wake when we consider Gregory's powerful recital of the duality in Christ and the principles involved in the use of both human and divine titles of Him, which is articulated during this examination of *John* 20:17:⁹

"He would say 'God', not of the Word, but of the one who was seen [the human nature of Christ]. For how could He be God of someone properly called God, Himself? In this same way the Father is father, not of the one who was seen, but of the Word, because he [Christ] was double [in nature]. So, the one [term] applies properly to both and the other applies, but not properly, in the opposite way to which it would be for us.

6. Or, 29. 10. 4-5

7. Or. 29.10.8-14

8. cf. Turner (1954) p. 214, who reacts to the Arians as forcefully as Gregory did: "Arian theology as a whole was hamstrung by a constitutional inability to handle a metaphor."

9. "Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." The treatment of this is found in Or. 30.8.

For God is properly the god of us, but not properly our father. It is this which causes the error of the heretics: that they attach the terms [to one nature or the other] while the names change back and forth because of the mixture [of the two natures in Christ]. An example of this is that when the natures are distinguished in [our] thoughts then the terms are taken along with them. Listen to what Paul says:¹⁰ 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory...' He [the Father] is the god of *Christ* [i.e. the human nature of Christ], but the father of *glory* [i.e. the divine nature of Christ]. If these two are one together it is not in nature but in their going together."

Gregory is explicit in claiming that words can be used in two ways at once with different meanings. This is not improper use of language but accurate use of it to describe a subtle reality. If Christ is both human and divine, He must be described as such, Gregory would say. The concern of the Neo-Arians for the integrity of their terminology, as evidenced by the two quotations from Eunomius above, would rule out this result as impossible because it would require both divinity and humanity to be predicated of the same individual. Because their theological effort is based, in this instance, on the guarding of their terminology and of their assumption of the necessary disjunction between God and all else, the Arians are unable to interpret the gospels as Gregory thinks necessary. The result Gregory's method yields is ruled out by their system. Gregory's theological effort is designed to make sense, through rational reflection, of what he finds in the gospels. Because the Arians interpose objections to this based on their theological or terminological assumptions, Gregory concludes that they put these concerns before a desire for Truth. In his mind this is the basic clash between the two theological systems.

When Gregory says:¹ "Faith fills out our [human] reason." it is the crystallization of his conviction that reason on its own is an inadequate tool. The guidance of Revelation and the Church are required to give reason the opportunity to apply its strength. Reason itself can be too inflexible to meet the actualities of

10. *Eph.* 1:17

1. *Or.* 29.21.13

an untidy world, as the Arian difficulty with terminology demonstrates. It must be prepared to bow to the particular form of the situation rather than to attempt to force the situation into a form it feels is appropriate. The introduction of other elements of equal weight with reason renders theology a more peculiarly Christian, and a more human, discipline because it is more involved in creation. Theology advances beyond philosophy in its possibilities and the tools available to it because it is granted the use of the concrete revelation of God through Scripture and is also the beneficiary of the guiding tradition of the Church. With these helps the theologian can advance further and through darker areas than can the philosopher who must see everything himself and has no tradition illumined by the Holy Spirit to hold him aright. Gregory's argument is one designed to widen out the range of tools available to the theologian and make them more sophisticated because more able to function on a variety of levels in a variety of ways.

His argument in Or. 31.23 in favour of the use of words not found in Scripture to express truths found there is another instance of this strain of thought in these orations.²

"So, where do you get 'ingenerate' and 'without beginning', which are your strongholds, and where do we get 'immortal'? Show us exactly where they appear or we will set them aside or strike them out as not scriptural and you will have perished by your own principles, along with these walls of safety which you have constructed. Is it clear that they [the Scriptures] bring them [the terms] along with them even if they are not spoken outright?"

Gregory points out that even the Arians themselves cannot keep to their stringent rules for theology. Gregory, therefore, holds that rules of that sort are unreasonable and counter-productive. Truth can be discovered only if reason is applied to Revelation. Gregory wishes to insist on the primacy of revelation but also on the need for thought. We must resist the temptation to cling to one while excluding the other. Revelation must be understood to be profitable. Thus the theologian needs the tools

2. Or. 31.23.1-7

of philosophy, grammar and logic if he is to make good use of the data of Christian theology.

Although Gregory is insistent on the close relation between the religious life and theology, he is also careful to make a distinction between them. In Or. 27.4 he says that, while we should remember God at all times (that is, we should live the religious life), theology is only for certain times and certain places. Though he wishes to require a certain level of Christian life for entering in upon theology, Gregory does not wish to confuse the two. The Christian life will make the theology possible, but theology is not merely the result of Christian living. It is more particular in its nature than that and also broader in its intellectual requirements than the Arians would suggest.

It is the mixture of different elements that distinguishes Gregory's view of theological method. He holds for Scripture and for reason; for the use of the grammatical sciences and for the need for the Christian life of worship and obedience in the Church. Gregory is not willing to select one of these and set it up over the others as the sole source of legitimacy. In this way he avoids the Arian penchant for clinging to the correctness of language and also stands against their desire to cling, at times, to the word of Scripture as if to a talisman. Gregory's theology has a variety of elements that make up its composition, but its variety makes it able to survive and function coherently in a plurality of situations.

How his use of images and similes fits into this theological scheme will be the first object of examination.

Gregory's convictions about the validity of using similes and metaphors based on the created world to describe the divine illuminate some important principles behind his theological efforts. Gregory makes clear that he is aware of the ineffectuality of images from creation for the full, proper depiction of the divinity. The limits he finds inherent in this kind of discourse will help define the limits he allows to the theological enterprise.

In Or. 31.31 he dismisses several possibilities for images of the Trinity, time-honored though they are: spring, fountain and river—sun, ray and light—a ray of sunlight, sun on a wall, the ray

moving because of moisture in the air—all these have their particular weaknesses described. Gregory's show how each of these can lead the mind astray. Not only are the difficulties of each particular simile apparent to Gregory, but the enterprise as such is inherently distasteful to him.³

"It is exceedingly disgraceful, and not only disgraceful but quite futile, to take a likeness of the things above from the things below, and of unmoved things from the changeable nature...⁴"

This is an extremely strong statement of disapproval and avowal of the distinction between creator and creation. Gregory is stressing the fact that similes are an attempt to accomplish impossible comparisons between two incompatible realms of existence. Some medium of expression is necessary for the theologian who attempts to frame truths in recognizable form, Gregory will tacitly admit by his own use of similes, but the validity of the method is sharply restricted.

These are fundamental philosophical problems which are raised in the attempt to bridge the gap between the One and the many:⁵

"What is this means [of expression] which is of these [created] things but is not these things? How is that thing, which is incomposite and unlike other things in nature, [like] all these things, and each one perfectly?"

This is a blunt statement of the difficulty. We cannot rise above the created realm with the aid of only created objects or forms of speech. The task is impossible. Because created things exist and have reference to themselves they naturally leap us on to reflect further on created rather than on the divine. Gregory does not, in the end, succumb entirely to this logical pessimism about the possibility of the theological task. Instead, with this caution in mind, Gregory concludes that it is possible to take

3. Or. 31.10.8–11

4. Notice the use of 'akineton' 'unmoved things' to describe the divine. Gregory's mind is working in philosophical categories as he considers the unbridgeable gulf between the creator and the created.

5. Or. 28.13.19–21

similes as they are meant, and to the extent they are meant to be valid, and so make use of them in spite of these weaknesses:⁶

“There is nothing, to my mind, which is evident as a settled principle for someone looking at these images, except that he should accept one [aspect] of the image and prudently cast aside the rest.”

An instance of this technique is Gregory's use of Adam as an example of the nature of the distinction between the generated and the ungenerated⁷. Adam, the product of direct creation by God, Gregory says, is human, as are all his descendants. He was created, his descendants are begotten, yet the nature of all is the same. Therefore, human nature is not defined by being begotten or unbegotten. In the same way, both Adam and God the Father were not begotten, but they would hardly be considered of the same nature. Thus the qualities 'begotten' and 'unbegotten' are seen to be non-determinative of essence. Only the most restricted reading of this simile can render it palatable to the heightened sensitivities of one so alive to the distinctions between the corporal and the incorporeal as Gregory, yet, read in that way, it is most convincing.

We should also note that the quotation above comes just a few lines before Gregory's last word on theological discourse in these orations: indeed, virtually the last line of the orations,⁸ where he describes himself as setting aside these likenesses and:

“At the last, it seemed best to me to let go and renounce the images and shadows as being deceitful and very much wanting in truth, and to hold on to more reverent ideas, standing [content] with few words and making use of the Spirit as a guide...”

Thus the lines in favour of the limited use of similes come just before a final repudiation of the entire human theological effort. Despite Gregory's approval of their use, he is clearly not willing to count on them for much of worth from a religious point

6. Or. 31.33.7-10

7. Or. 29.11

8. Or. 31.33. 10-14.

of view¹. There are few things that Gregory feels comfortable saying about the divine and he will be even more careful about using similes and metaphors rather than more declarative methods, because of their inherent tendency to mislead.

We must keep in mind, as Gregory makes clear in Or. 29.5, that the difficulty in theology of fitting the simile to the thing described is a two-edged sword: it evades our grasp in two ways at once. We choose our similes on the basis of what we know of the world around us, but their validity is judged by how they relate to what we do not know. While on the other hand, some of the terms we use of the created world are true only by analogy with the truth of the Godhead: we see only the reflection of what they express, never the reality. For example: the Father is the only true father, humans are called so by analogy to Him. However, since we know in an expressible way only the analogous fathers, our use of this analogy is rooted in very little. We are trying to understand the real through the examination of the less real. Gregory has accepted, in this case at least, the platonic idea of the world as analogous to a higher reality², but has pushed the created world farther away from the creator than Plato or Plotinus ever did because of his Christian belief in the absolute unlikeness of creator and created³. Gregory does not accept the neo-Platonic teaching of a hierarchy of existence which transmits likeness throughout its extent. He does not agree that the created realm begins with an overflow from the divine unity⁴. Indeed, his low opinion of similes in theology comes from more than just a conviction of the lack of congruence between

1. Here Gregory's use of similes seems the result of a need to express coherent doctrine, probably in the face of opposition, rather than of a conviction that the expression of such doctrine is inherently helpful to the religious approach to the divine. Gregory seems to expect more real closeness to God from speechless dependence on the Spirit than from all his elegant formulae. It should be noted that the reference to dependence on the Spirit as guide is not much removed from an attachment to the inspired tradition of the Church, expressed at Or. 28.28.41-44 as preference for faith rather than reason as guide.

2. cf. Plato, *Parmenides*.

3. The quotation from Or. 31.10.8-11 which appeared earlier in the chapter is an indication of the conviction of absolute unlikeness. It is 'disgraceful' even to attempt to draw illustrations of what is above from what is below.

4. cf. Whittar (1928) pp. 54ff. which refers chiefly to Plotinus Enn. v. 2,1.

the divine and the created: it springs from the fact that our attempts to bridge the gap must necessarily come from the created side and so be based, even in their conception, on shadowy reflection rather than solid reality. We should not wonder that he wishes to set these treacherous tools aside and content himself with very little speech.

As an example of Gregory's use of similes we can turn to solar images. These provide a sample that will help us understand how his philosophical caution about images translates into use.

Gregory's use of the sun in images to help illustrate truths about the Godhead is selective and cautious. He allows particular aspects of the sun's nature to be relevant, for example:

in Or. 30.6 he likens the sun burning off ground fog in the morning to the purgative powers of the Divine nature in Christ operating on the human nature.

in Or. 31.14 he likens the Trinity to three suns which together produce one light.

in Or. 28.30, following Plato⁵, he likens the place of the sun in the sensible world to that of God in the intelligible.

Still, despite this, Gregory is quite careful in his enumeration of the reasons why similes fall short of truly representing what they depict⁶.

"Then again, I had in mind the sun and its ray and light. But with this example there is the fear: first, that someone might imagine a composition in the incomposite nature: as of the sun and the things in the sun; and, second, that we might invest the Father with substantive existence but treat the others [the Son and the Spirit] as subsisting [in Him], making of them powers which have the ground of their existence in God without enjoying their own substantive existences, since neither ray nor light is another sun but are rather solar effluences of quasi-substantial nature''.

Notice how restricted are the circumstances in which and the objects for which Gregory will allow the sun to be used in

5. *Republic* VI, 508c.

6. Or. 31.32.1-9.

similes. He is attempting by this means to minimize the tendency to mislead which is inevitable in this effort. Gregory is clearly aware of the incompatibility of finite and infinite, or of corporal and incorporeal and does not wish to go astray. The essential dissimilarity of created and uncreated make comparisons fundamentally invalid despite whatever usefulness they can claim to have.

So we see that the response of the theologian, in Gregory's mind, to the dilemma of needing to bridge the gulf to God and knowing that all attempts to do so carry their own limitation is to use the available tool but to try to minimize the fault by limiting the range of each simile used. This seems a reasonable balance of the difficulties.

Gregory's concern with the difficulties of language in theology is not addressed only in the context of metaphorical language in this discussion with the Arians, though he takes them on directly as well.

A particularly important line of argument against the Arians for Gregory is his objection that they wish to treat language as concrete, which we have touched on earlier in this chapter. They use words, both scriptural and theological, as if they were objects on the same level of reality as the things they describe. For example, we may quote again:⁷

"They [the Arians] say: 'Did [the Father] beget the Son willingly or unwillingly?... For if he was not willing', they say, 'then he was mastered, and who was doing the mastering? How is one who is mastered God? If He was willing, then the Son is the son of 'the will', and how then is He from the Father?'

Here Gregory endeavours to show where this tendency leads when it is used of words in scriptural descriptions of God. In this instance, the 'will' and 'generation' of God become equal to the Word of God and the Deity begins to become more and more multiform. Gregory holds that a clear reading without this bias shows us that Scripture does not use words to describe

7. Or. 29.6.2-9

8. Or. 29.6.13-19

God in a concrete way. The easiest way to show how inappropriate is the Arian reading is by analogy to a thing better known to us:⁸

“You who say whatever you want, recklessly, [tell me] did you spring from a willing father or an unwilling? If it was from an unwilling one, then he was mastered. By what force, and who was mastering him? You would not say that it is nature [that mastered him], for that allows for intelligent action. If he begot you willingly, then your father has perished in those few syllables and you are shown to be the son of ‘will’.”

So, no human being can ever be the child of his father, if the Arians are to be believed. We are all either the children of nature or of the ‘will’ of our fathers. This Arian tendency, when applied in reading, as the example above shows, mocks what the text really does say. The content of the Scripture is voided by this attempt to read it against its own logic.

In Or. 29.12 the same point is expanded upon in reference to whether the terms ‘generate’ and ‘ungenerated’ describe the divine essence when they are used of the Father and the Son.⁹

“If the Son, they say, is the same in essence as the Father, and the Father is unbegotten then the Son is unbegotten too. That’s fine, if the essence of God is unbegotten, but would render the novel concoction: the Begotten-unbegotten. But if the difference between them is other than in essence, then what is the value of this you are saying as if it were a strong [argument]?”

Here, as in Or. 30.18, Gregory asserts that ‘God’ is a relational term descriptive of the relation, between God and creation and that for ‘ungenerated’ to be proved to be of the essence of God it must also be a relational term, for only so could the two terms have the same range of applicability.¹⁰

9. Or. 29.12.1–5

10. Behind this is the idea that, since the divinity is wholly simple, any property which truly belongs to it must be interchangeable with any other such property to avoid multiplicity in the thing described.

However, since 'ungenerated' is a term which does not refer beyond the object it describes, Gregory continues, these two terms are not interchangeable, and this Arian argument becomes irrelevant to the matter at hand.¹¹

"If it were the same thing (i. e. if unbegotten were the same thing as God], then the God who is 'God' of these things would be the 'unbegotten' of them. Or, since He is not the 'unbegotten' of anything He would not be the 'God' of them, either. For things which are equivalent bear their meaning in the same way. But, He is *not* the 'unbegotten' of anything (of what would He be?) and God is the 'God' of these things (of everything, actually). How, then, could 'God' and 'unbegotten' be the same thing?"

Through the introduction of a short discussion of the instance most relevant to the estimation of the value of this neo-Arian use of language, Gregory has demonstrated the incoherence of and important neo-Arian premise which is implicit in their argument: that language is univalent in its usage and so can be applied without regard to context. Gregory sums up his point:¹²

"Not everything which said about something is said of it with regard to its underlying essence."

The Arians, as he points out in concluding this section, have made the mistake of confusing with each other the limits of applicability to be granted to terms properly used of something in only one respect. They have tried to treat all terms as having equal ranges of reference.

Norris points out in his commentary¹³ that Aristotle had argued in *Categories* 1a that members of a class or species do not have to have all their characteristics shared within the group. Norris contends that Gregory's manner of pointing out this error makes clear that he wishes his hearers to know that his opponents are revealing their lack of education by the sort

11. Or. 29.12.9-15

12. Or. 29.15.5

13. (1991) p. 150 ff.

of mistakes they are making, and wishes to claim that their argument on this point is the fruit of their resultant confusion.¹⁴

Gregory sets alongside this argument the Arians' willingness to call the Son 'God'. They might seem to be making a concession of the central point at issue, but the Arians follow that admission (which they could hardly avoid since it is in the mouth of St. Thomas)¹ with the contention that the word is not used of both Father and Son with the same meaning, but only as a 'homonym':²

14. Norris makes much of this line of attack throughout his commentary particularly in reference to the first sections of Or. 27, (1991) p. 86 ff. Of the general trend of Gregory's arguments against the neo-Arians, Norris (1991) p. 105, says: "In Oration 28 Nazianzen notes his opponents' misunderstanding of human intellectual limitations; in 29 he details their ignorance of how rhetorical enthymemes are used in argument. In 30 he attacks their poor knowledge of elementary logic and grammar employed in Biblical exegesis; in 31 he returns to their misappropriation of syllogisms. All these are educational deficiencies..." It is clear that Gregory feels the neo-Arians incapable of the subtle sort of work necessary for advanced theology because of their lack of education and their inappropriate disposition in relation to the theological enterprise. This was not a new ground on which to attack the neo-Arians. Kopecek (1979) p. 65 mentions that Aetius suffered this sort of intellectual snobbery even during the period of his education, and, on p. 373, he mentions Basil's characterization of Eunomius as "an uneducated man". Other ancient authors also echo this assessment. Socrates (1983) p. 60 calls Aetius' education "some very scanty instruction". He says of the neo-Arians as a group, on page 111: "Indeed, although Eunomius, who was then their champion, and many others on the side of the Arians were considered men of great eloquence, yet whenever they attempted to enter into controversy with Gregory and Basil, they appeared in comparison to them ignorant and illiterate." Gregory's recurring references to this lack of educational background on the part of his opponents was a standard piece of the Nicene description of their neo-Arian adversaries. One can see that Oration 27 is very much a part of this argument against the neo-Arian theology and that the lengthy repetitive illustrations of the mistaken linguistic gymnastics of the neo-Arians are central stones in Gregory's theological construction. He will repeat these strictures as often as possible to increase the impression of his opponent's intellectual incompetence,

1. *John* 20:28.

2. Or. 29.13.23ff.

"They admit that the Son is God, when they are forced by the Gospel and the witness of the saints, but it is an equivocal sharing in name alone."³

This is a devastating point against those who use the solid dependable univocality of language as one of their main premises of argument. Does this not destroy at one blow the Arian attempt to read Scripture in a mechanical concrete fashion? If this use of 'God' in Scripture is merely equivocal, how are we to know that nothing else there is descriptive or symbolic language? Why should the Arians be allowed to choose *this* term to treat elastically in the midst of treating all others rigidly? The neo-Arians are working as much from their sense of 'what is fitting to the Divine' as Gregory is from his. The lack of logical connection between their rule for the use of language and their actual use of it in this most central instance is proof of that.

Gregory does not only object to the neo-Arians' desire to use language as having a dependably concrete nature. He also objects to their attempts to create apparent logical paradoxes so that through force of logic they are able to force their own opinions on their opponents. The real value of this technique depends on the firmness of the paradox and the unassailable correctness of the solution offered by the poser of the problem. Gregory chooses to attack by casting doubt on the validity of the problems posed.

Earlier in Oration 29, section 9, Gregory addressed this tactic of offering a question with two proposed answers: one, which the Arians expect no one would be willing to accept, and the other, the answer they wish to elicit from the Nicenes. Some examples of these false choices with which the Arians try to advance their case are: Did the Father beget the Son willingly or not? and: Did the Son exist already when the Father beget Him, or not? By offering absurd questions of his own about more mundane matters, for example: Is time in time or out of

3. Gallay's note ad loc., quoted above in Chapter IV, is a timely reminder of how loose a connection the sharing of a name could be. For a good discussion of Eunomius' argument about homonyms in Book III of the *Apol. Apol.*, see Kopecek (1979) pp. 472-481.

time? Gregory is able to show that the method is ridiculous and demonstrative only of the fact that it is possible to play around with language in all sorts of ways that do not reflect reality. Problems may be posed which are not, in fact, dilemmas but only illogical word plays. By establishing that language is not necessarily bound to reality, Gregory is able to weaken greatly this central neo-Arian assumption.⁴

It is important for us to note, in closing this section, that, as Kennedy⁵ points out: "obsession with the definition of words had not characterized earlier greek public address" but was rather an outgrowth of the peculiar circumstances and subject matter of the controversies which rent the antique Church. That this form of debate is so highly developed here by one so deeply imbued as Gregory in the earlier pagan classical tradition of elegant elocution is a testimony to how far the internal Christian debate had developed and how clearly Gregory saw where the real points in dispute lay. Gregory has moved beyond his education and background in this argument because he saw that the heart of the matter lay in the use of language as applied to Scripture and argument. This is eloquent evidence of Gregory's concern for the protection of the Christian revelation through a proper assessment of it on its own terms. This is the aim of Gregory's defence of the flexibility of language against the Arian's yearning for fixity: only with flexible language can an ineffable reality be properly addressed by finite minds.

Gregory's argument against the neo-Arians is not confined to language and its uses but extends through the range of Christian life. Even in these five orations we can see evidence of other aspects of his case being made.

4. Norris, (1991) p. 142, says that Gregory attacks the form of these puzzles the neo-Arians wish to set. "The Theologian faults Eunomian logical acuity both in its popular and 'learned' forms." i. e. He claims that they have mixed up the proper forms for this sort of logical enquiry and so demonstrated further their lack of proper education. Because of their own confusion, the Arians do not have the tools for the task and do not have the tools to recognize properly the manner of their own mistakes.

5. Kennedy (1983) pp. 205-206.

Gregory's confidence that he is arguing for the tradition of the Church against innovators is manifested in his use of the Church's traditions of corporate and individual worship in his attacks on the neo-Arians. Of course, he had seen this sort of argument come from the pen of his friend Basil in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*.⁶ It is a further tribute to the greatness of that treatise that Basil's friend, a greater theologian than he, should taken on this part of his friend's armament.

In Or. 31.6 Gregory argues, after having brought forward texts from Scripture which show the Spirit acting in a personal and independent manner, that we believe 'in' the Spirit as we do 'in' Christ or 'in' the Father. So we must admit that we place the Spirit on a par with the other two in practice, and thus should do so in theory as well.⁷

"But if it [the Spirit] is a creature, how can we believe in it or be perfected in it? It is not the same thing to believe 'in' something as to believe 'about' something. The former is [used] of divinity and the latter of any *thing*."

The central point here is the one regarding worship. No argument which depends for success on invalidating the Church's traditional confession can hope to have success with an audience of the simple pious. By placing the quarrel here Gregory has met the enemy on ground favorable to his own weapons.

This point is buttressed by Gregory's insistence in Or. 31.12 that since we pray 'in' the Spirit and worship 'in' the Spirit⁸ we have before us proof that the Spirit acts in us and for us in worship, and so must be considered a Person, since it is persons who act.

This argument calls upon the aid of the whole tradition of Christians about the efficacy of their worship and how the

6. Basil's arguments in sec. 34 ff. on the baptismal tradition, and sec. 16 on the Doxology, are particularly effective in this regard. The witness of prayers and liturgical actions, hallowed and familiar through countless repetitions, is an extremely powerful ally in argument.

7. Or. 31.6.17-20.

8. *Jn* 4:24 "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

results are obtained. The argument has descended from the lofty plane of rhetorical correctness, philosophical exactitude and proper interpretation of scriptural texts to the level where the actions of the listeners are involved and placed in jeopardy if the conclusion put forward by Gregory's opponents is allowed. Gregory has managed to place the congregation in the midst of the argument rather than on the sidelines. They can agree with his opponents if they are willing to give up or disbelieve their traditional worship, or they can hold to their worship and agree with Gregory. Gregory seeks to turn himself into the champion of familiar and reverent tradition at a time of theological upheaval. The yearning for certainty in the Faith can be a powerful addition to the attraction of Gregory's teaching, if he can convince the people that he stands for what they have always believed.

Just as in his *Theological Letters*⁹ where he argued that if his understanding of the Incarnation was not agreed upon then the salvation of mankind by Christ was lost, Gregory uses this self-identification with the pious tradition of the Church to strike a chord in the Christian consciousness of his hearers. The success of his attempt to establish his view of the interlocking of christology and soteriology as necessary for all Christians to believe is demonstrated by the directness with which this contention of his is faced, even by modern writers, when others wish to take a different approach to the question of salvation.¹⁰

So we see that Gregory is able to move beyond the linguistic and rhetorical in his opposition to the neo-Arians. Since the quarrel is above all a religious one it is on the level of the faith and practice of the people that it can most effectively be fought out. A victory for Gregory on the level of faith and practice would bring with it victory in the entire debate. In the atmosphere of the later stages of the Arian Controversy it was absolutely necessary to engage all the well-developed arguments the opposition could muster, and this Gregory has done in his argument over the use of Scripture and of language in theology. The argument from practice just shown and that from a sense

9. esp. Ep. 101 sec. 32

10. e. g. "The Unassumed is the Unhealed" in Willes (1976) pp. 108ff.

of what is fitting to God, which will be examined next are valid counterparts to those already reviewed. Indeed, many in Gregory's audience would feel that these lie closer to the heart of the matter than those more strictly theological.

The sense of what it is fitting to say of God is an important basis for a certain strand of Gregory's arguments. This proper sense of reverence toward God that will not allow unseemly conclusions or assumptions to enter into the debate we will call a sense of "what is fitting for God."

An important presupposition based on a sense of "what is fitting for God" is Gregory's insistence on the incomprehensibility to all created natures of the divine nature. In Or. 28.4, having approved of, and even strengthened, Plato's assertion¹¹ that God is difficult to know but impossible to explain, Gregory expounds the impossibility of grasping the divine for even the most spiritually advanced of saints.¹²

"It is completely impossible and impracticable to grasp this thing [God] with the [human] mind. This is so not only for those who act carelessly and fall away, but even for those who are especially lofty and loving of God, and likewise for all generated nature."

This is surely not an argument based on the Scriptures, which, along with many passages proclaiming God's incomprehensibility, also contain many revelations of the nature of God: that He is 'He who is',¹³ that He is 'love',¹⁴ etc... It is, rather, based on this philosophical tradition of the utter unlikeness of corporeal to incorporeal and of creator to created. Gregory gives the audience no sign of wrestling to discover which group of scriptural texts should be taken as primary. He knows the truth of the matter and wishes to pass on to matters which are in dispute.

11. *Timaeus* 28c: "It is a great feat to discover the Maker and Father of All, and when you have found Him it is impossible to express Him fully." Celsus quotes this at *C. Celsum* VII. 42. Chadwick, in *Origen* (1953) n. 1 p. 429, calls this citation of the *Timaeus*: "perhaps the most hackneyed quotation from Plato in Hellenistic writers."

12. Or. 28.4.8-12

13. *Ex.* 3:14

14. *1 Jn.* 4:8

We should also notice that in Or. 28.7 + 8 Gregory addresses the question of the incorporeality of God by declaring that corporeality causes division and discord because of the composite nature of bodies, and so is impossible for the perfectly simple deity.¹⁵

“How is it [a body] holy if it is circumscribed? How will it escape being composed of elements and then decomposing into them again or even dissolving completely? Disagreement is one sort of struggle and dissolution is another, but dissolution is completely foreign to God and the Primary Nature.”

In section 8, toward the end of this small *discursus*, two scriptural texts are introduced to show that there are scriptural truths in question here, but this is mere window-dressing after the question has already been decided.¹⁶ The incorporeality of the divine was already a given for Gregory because it was long held by the philosophical tradition to be proper for divinity¹⁷ and he has then tacked on these texts to bring the argument into the Christian realm. The proof of this is that the citations are an addition to the discussion rather than the source of it. They are not made the object of any exegesis but are offered as the Christian crown on an argument made of pagan bones and flesh.

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15. Or. 28.7.8–13 The conviction that what is appropriate to the divine should guide the interpretation of Scripture is not peculiar to the Nicene side of the Arian debate. Vaggione in Eunomius (1987) notes the same idea present in *The Apology for the Apology* Bk III, p. 117. Vaggione summarizes the passage thus: “Titles applied to the Only-Begotten by scripture are to be taken in a sense befitting the divine; the same principle applies to the word ‘Son’.” It is evident that we must have knowledge of these writers’ ideas of fittingness in theology if we are to understand their works.
 16. The texts cited are: *Jer.* 23:24 “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.” and *Wis.* 1:7 “For the Spirit of the Lord filleth the world: and that which containeth all things hath knowledge of the voice.” Could not these be more readily understood as symbolic utterances than as refutations of the idea of a corporal deity?
 17. Sallustius I. 6–8 (1926) p.2 “every god is good and impassive and unchangeable (since whatever changes, changes for better or for worse; if for worse, it becomes bad, if for the better, it proves to have been bad in the first place).” This is the inescapable fate of the corporal in the eyes of the pagan philosophical tradition, and so, in the mind of Gregory, this would be categorized as common sense.

Because we, too, assume the incorporeality of God we do not notice the difference between the treatment of this question and the question of the status of the Son's divinity. Our acceptance of the conclusion blinds us to the manner in which the 'fact' is introduced. Like Gregory, we pass over this topic to reach something we wish to engage. Incorporeality is not a matter that Gregory labors over because it is one of the traits he has been trained to regard as inalienable properties for the divinity. The strongest arguments in Gregory's opinion may turn out to be the weakest to the eye of the unconvinced reader because they are not logically developed or fully defended.

In Or. 29.2, where Plotinus' idea of the created world as the result of a sort of overflow of the divine is mentioned and dismissed, there is no attempt to argue about the question on any grounds at all. The matter is solved with.¹

"We should not ever introduce [the idea of] some sort of natural and difficult-to-contain superfluity, which is the least suitable for ideas of the divinity".

The difference in the treatment of these two matters is a result of Gregory's opinion of the likelihood of the view he disapproves being attractive to his Christian listeners, but the basis of disagreement in these three cases is this same sense of what is an acceptable possibility and what is not. Again, this non-argument would carry no weight at all with someone who wanted to hear the matter thrashed out. In this instance, there is not even a token introduction of Scripture.

To our eyes, these passages which argue from an inner sense of fittingness rather than by interpretation of Scripture or reasoned philosophical argument may seem out of place. To Gregory they are likely to have seemed the most certain and unassailable of all the points he puts forward. Certainly, because they embody the received wisdom of his age, they were unlikely to be attacked. For us, though, it is useful to pluck them out and group them together because they show clearly at least some of the bedrock assumptions through which Gregory read Scripture, philosophy

Or. 29.2.22ff.

“Although your nature is one, its interpretations are many. Its genealogies are lofty and middling and even lowly, like a crust of bread for the lowly”.

The multiplicity of proper interpretations is a strike at any tendency to elitist technical theology and certainly denies anything like a strict one-to-one correspondance of terms to realities. How could a specialized technical system be supported if there are theological truths that people on a variety of levels can grasp? Where is the point in fussing over elaborate theories of theological language if there is more than one way of stating a theological truth? If the efforts of the neo-Arians to control and manipulate language are not necessary and do not lead to exclusive knowledge of the Truth, who will bother to engage in them? Ephraem's picture of theological truth as being open to a variety of forms of expression is one that would make those convinced of the efficacy and necessity of the work of the neo-Arians cringe. For the pious rank and file, however, this conviction holds out hope, since, like the Syro-Phoenician woman⁶, we can hope for the scraps from the table no matter how lowly our degree and education. In fact, picking up scraps fallen from the table is very much how Ephraem pictures the theological task: to take what God will let fall and make of it what we can⁷:

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“His nature is both hidden and revealed, though indeed He is completely hidden. It is revealed *that* He is, but hidden *how* He is. Let us leave alone what He has left and grasp what He has made us grasp”.

This is not a picture of theology as a human operation with God as its object, it rather presents theology as a combined project of the divine and the human, with God enabling our every step forward. Ephraem is also very careful to point out

6. Mark 7:25 ff.

7. H 33.3

that the limits to our progress are real and due to what God chooses to reveal or keep hidden. We are able to progress, but how much and in what direction is not up to us.

Revelation is the gift of God which makes this possible. The limits of revelation are the limits of what we can know because they define not only the bounds of what information we are given but also the bounds of what we can investigate⁸.

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“The Scriptures which paint a picture of Son do not depict any ‘when’ about Him. Though they proclaim the Father they do not proclaim any ‘how’ about Him. These things do not fall into the realm of investigation.”

The limits of theological inquiry are clearly set by the limits of Revelation. We are not to attempt to pass beyond. The material on which our reason is meant to operate is given to us, the reason with which we operate is given to us, and, through these two, the limit of our progress is a given as well. In fact, Ephraem is moved to say also that our own self knowledge is given to us rather than inherent in us,¹ so intent is he on insisting that knowledge and its limits come from beyond our reach.

The whole of this line of argument should be seen as proof of Ephraem’s desire to make clear that he posits God as the source of all theology as much as its object. Compare the tenor of this thought to that of one who would claim to know God as He does Himself.² Ephraem’s theological vision inhabits a different cosmos than that of the neo-Arians. Indeed, Ephraem is absolutely specific in his assertion that the full glory of God is not available to us:³

8. H 33.6

1. S 4.19

2. as Eunomius (1987) Fragment ii p. 178

3. H 26.6

[illegible]

“There were reasons why He commanded that they [the names of God] be spoken so feebly. If He had undertaken to speak according to the glory and wonder of His divinity it would have made those who heard it stray and have become a stumbling block to childishness. The simple would have perished and the perfect would have fallen short. He made use of all sorts of likenesses so that each person, as much as he was able, could be up to the task.”

Ephraem does not think that God has denied us all knowledge of Himself, but rather that we are not capable of it. Rather than mislead us with what we could not handle, God has purposefully given us enough images of all sorts so that all sorts of people can find their way to some true understanding of Him, pale though it may be. Ephraem is not pushing the seeker away from the divine he yearns for, but rather is trying to help him to as much of his goal as he is able to grasp. In fact, this draws us closer to God than we would be if we settled for the misleading certainties of the neo-Arians. Without God's help none of us can succeed, but with this help we can *all* succeed insofar as we are able. We must be led by the hand at each step and cannot, even with the help of revelation, come closer to God than knowledge of these likenesses of Him. Ephraem teaches God's mercy to us in granting us real theological knowledge and stresses our own unworthiness, even inability, to receive it.

The logical complement of finite human knowledge, the incomprehensibility of the divine, is also expressed as a theme

through these works of Ephraem. An examination of that strand as such will deepen our understanding of his insistence on our knowledge being contained by our nature. So we see Ephraem begin with a bald statement of this conviction, shared, as we have seen, by Gregory:⁴

ܠܡܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ

"God cannot be investigated by a human."⁵

This is a commonplace in Christian theology, albeit not self-evident to later Arians. It is not surprising that the first four lines of what is now called the *First Sermon On the Faith* make even thinking that one could attain to God seem ludicrous.⁶

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"I marvel at our [human] forwardness that you have assailed one so lofty. It was not that you attempted it that I marveled at, but rather that you thought you would achieve your goal".

Ephraem's understanding of the relation of the divine to creatures leaves him unable to grasp why anyone would attempt this ridiculous task.

This relationship to God is not a predicament that we can put behind us; the greatest and most diligent students and teachers cannot grasp even things that are below the divine. No amount of study or expertise can bring us to the level of comprehending God.⁷

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"Although this lesson is too great, both for the teachers and the students, it is far below its creator, for examining whom it is not sufficient."

4. e. g. Or. 28.4, Or. 28.11, Or. 28.13, Or. 28.17, Or. 28.21

5. H 2.2.2

6. S 1.1-4

7. S 5.21-24

Ephraem is not claiming that there is a complete separation of God from humans, nor is he suggesting that we turn aside from the attempt to know God.⁸ This is not an abdication of opportunity or an escape from responsibility. This avowal of the hopelessness inherent in the theological task, which is a direct repudiation of the neo-Arian "technology", comes itself as the result of long reflection and deep insight. Consider this:⁹

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"A human being is too small to be able to hear all tongues. Even if he should be able to hear the speech of spiritual angels, then he would still need to be lifted up to hear the silence which is spoken between the Father and the Son."

In Ephraem's picture of theology, as divine things are discussed (or perhaps 'expressed' would be a better word) on higher and higher levels, the content and level of exactitude of what is communicated diminishes. The highest level has gone beyond all verbal communication, of however, lofty a type, and has come to its full fruition in silence.¹⁰

ܐܢܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ

"Dignify and honor your generation with silence."

Comprehensibility, definition, expression: all these are limitations of the true theology which is spoken within the God head itself. This is a stern rebuke to those who feel that divinity can be exactly expressed through the proper use of human speech. Rather than thinking of ascendant theology as becoming more and more exact in its use of terms until it is perfectly expressing the divine essence, as the neo-Arians hold, Ephraem sees theology

8. Murray (1975) p. 17 says Ephraem tends to the apophatic but "is never anti-intellectualist".

9. H 11.7

10. This is the refrain, and so the central message, of Hymn 18

advancing beyond and away from language until it leave its completely behind. This contrast illustrates the depth of the divergence between these two views. Ephraem's picture of perfection to strive for and of the relation between elementary and final, perfected theology is virtually the direct opposite of that at the heart of Eunomius' teaching. In Ephraem's view, the whole neo-Arian effort indicates a misunderstanding of the upper levels of theological discourse and a blindness to the human's low estate.

This distance between God and humans is merely one result of the gulf separating the divine from all else. He does not let it stand on its own. As well as arguing directly from this fact, Ephraem also turns it to the service of his cause by making it the backdrop of an argument based on the very limited knowledge we possess even of the created world.

Throughout all his theological endeavour Ephraem remains constantly aware of the great gulf between the creator and the created. Though this is by nature a bar to progress in theological knowledge, Ephraem does try to turn it to same use in controversy at hand by taking advantage of an *a fortiori* argument based upon it: if there is a great gulf between the divine and the created, and if it can be shown that our knowledge of the created is extremely limited, is it not true that our knowledge of the divine must be immeasurably *more* limited? The presentation of an awareness of one's lack of knowledge as itself being knowledge has a proud tradition, Socrates himself claiming it in his speech before the jury which would soon convict him¹¹ Ephraem is able to use it in this way at the end of a long string of truths which he considers to be linked to one another.

The first of these truths is that knowledge is power: the power of the knower over the known. It is also an indication of rank:¹²

$\alpha_0 \geq \alpha_1 = 0$; $-2\pi^2 \leq p_1 \leq 2\pi^2$

“The thing which can be [successfully] investigated, its examiner is greater than it.”

11. Plato, *Apology* 21 B/C

12. $S\ 2.323 = 4$

The aphoristic delivery of this truth indicates how self-evident Ephraem considers it to be. He does not bother to back it up by argument since the possibility of its being challenged does not enter his mind.¹³ With his measuring stick for finding one's place in the order of things on his mind, it is a sobering experience for Ephraem to reflect on where this locate:¹⁴

ܐܠܗܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
ܐܠܗܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ

"The dust, which is lowlier than you are, is loftier than you in the matter of its being examined. If the lowly is loftier than you are, how will you attain to the lofty?"

If even the most mundane and uncomplicated of created things is beyond our ken, where does that leave us in relation to the divine?

Ephraem quite often makes use of this way of highlighting the distance which separates us from the divine. I presume that this is because of the incontrovertible nature of the examples human ignorance on which he bases it, which give the argument a concrete plausability all too often lacking in theological discourse¹⁵. Because of this he offers a series of catalogues of the various wonders of creation which are beyond human understanding, for example: the mysteries of the human mind¹⁶ (if we cannot understand our own ܐܠܗܝܢ "speech" how can we grasp God's?) and the wonders of the animal and plant kingdoms.¹⁷ He stresses elsewhere the inscrutable nature of created things in general,¹⁸

13. In this respect it occupies the same place in his thoughts as Gregory's arguments from "what is fitting for God" do in his.

14. S 1.169-172

15. Gregory makes use of just the same style of argument for the same purpose in Or. 28. 22-31. Their parallel views of the relation of God to creation give them urge to dwell on the comprehensibility of the creator and His creation.

16. H 57

17. H 65.6 ff. and H 64.6 ff.

18. H 41.1-5 and H 47.3

and state his conclusions from these in a particularly vehement form in Hymn 58:¹⁹

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ܐܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

“Just as the name of dust is more despised than that of God, even more so is the examination of dust to be despised compare to the examination of its creator. It [dust] is despised both in its name and in its actuality.”

The *a fortiori* character of the argument is seen very clearly here, as is its dependence for effectiveness on being rooted in the familiar created world. It seems clear that this line of argument is directed against neo-Arian assertions of knowledge of the divine. Ephraem's use of commonly held assumptions as bases for his case allows him to mount a strong challenge against these assertions and their implications. His counterattack through humility aims to take away the force of a proud Arian conviction by requiring a successful defence of the claim that we know the created world exhaustively or that there is not a gulf between creator and created if they wish to counter his argument. It would be astonishing if the neo-Arians were able to succeed along either one of those lines.

Now that we have seen some of Ephraem's denials of our ability to know the divine, we should turn to see how he attempts to communicate what he thinks we *do* know. The combination of the two will give us a fuller understanding of his thought.

Since Ephraem makes frequent use of similes and metaphors in his attempts to depict the divine, it is necessary to understand the extent of the force and validity arises.

19. strophe 4.3 ff.

A review of all of the similes and metaphors occurring in the sermons and hymns *De Fide* shows that Ephraem considers them to be allowable because they are the means of God's softening of His brightness to enable us to grasp as much of Him as we are able.¹

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"In the ray which came out from Him, He softened His marvelous power. Indeed, the one who makes us strong was not weakened. He was attractive when He softened it for us. We represented Him with a ray of light, though this is not really like Him, for there is nothing that can accurately represent Him. He was depicted by images that we might learn of Him according to our ability by means of these His blessed aids."

These ܕܝܢ or ܕܝܢ 'types' or 'symbols' are present throughout nature.² ܕܝܢ is merely a transliteration of the Greek word 'typos' which means a blow and so, by extension, the image left by a die after it has been struck. ܕܝܢ is more extensive in its range of possible meanings, Murray (1975) offers "symbols, types and mysteries" as English equivalents and then

1. H 6.3

2. cf. H 25.7 and H 76.12

adds that already in old imperial Aramaic [it] was borrowed from Persian to mean a royal secret, then divine secrets such as Daniel revealed" (p. 3). Later p. 5, he stresses the priority of the existence of the $\{\text{ܐܝܢܐ}\}$ in nature: "The Bible contains *raze* revelatory symbols of Christ, because the whole world does." El-Khoury, (1985) p. 93, says this: "...the general concept 'rāzā' (symbol) signifies a means to understanding which can be perceived by the senses, but which nevertheless leads the understanding to the abstract-ideal which is hidden from the material eye." It is in this general category of "a means to understanding which can be perceived by the senses" that $\{\text{ܐܝܢܐ}\}$ is considered here. They are necessary because the direct revelation of the true extent of the divine glory would not be enlightening, but instead would be devastating, for human beings. So, though it is dangerous to presume upon the similes we draw from Scripture, still they are needed for us to grasp even the remote impression of God's likeness.³

ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
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 ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ

"The likenesses which are useful to humankind come forth from the treasury of the Lord of All. According to the time and situation He has set forth a likeness, to help us: at times an appearance of indignation, at times one of cheerfulness, at times one of weakness, and at times one of quietness. Though, in Himself, He was always the same, according to the laws that prevail among us, He was changeable."

3. H 26.8 see also stanzas 6 + 7

The actions of God, as well as His essence, are thus the source of information about Him by means of likenesses designed for our comprehension. We are not presented with the truth, but with the truth as we can grasp it. Because of the insurmountable chasm between creator and created we must make use of these indications although we know they are misleading. It is not only our distance from the divine, though, which makes these likenesses so inexact. Ephraem is aware of the fundamental truth governing the exactitude attainable in this sort of communication:⁴

ܠܠܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ
ܠܠܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ
ܠܠܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ

“See, then, that every parable which is fashioned or composed, if it were capable of depicting the thing to the fullness of its perfection would be found not to be a likeness but the actual thing itself.”

Likenesses cannot be full representations of the truth. Indeed, Ephraem is careful to make special mention of the fact that even those similes which appear to us to be particularly close to the original are, in fact, far distant from what they represent.⁵ We should never assume too much validity for these symbols, despite the fact that they are necessary both for the apprehension of God by the individual and for the communication of such theological knowledge as it is possible for us to acquire.

The result of this combination of assertions by Ephraem is that the use of these likenesses is helpful to us, even necessary, while at the same time being, to a certain extent, misleading. The help which they can provide is evidence of God's concern for us,⁶ and should be gratefully accepted, always keeping in mind the limits of its validity.

4. H 42.11.1-3

5. H 42.13.3 ff.

6. This is witnessed by the softening of His glory mentioned in H 6.3.

The warning which lurks behind this discussion of the use of similes in theological discourse carries with it the logical complement of the conviction that any attempt to overstep these bounds is a presumption rooted in pride and doomed to fail. Thus we see that this theological system inherently contains within itself its own boundaries. Unbounded theological exploration is not possible for humans, in Ephraem's opinion. When think we see too much in the ܐܠܗܐ 'mirror' of nature, we must remember that what we see so clearly is only a reflection of ourselves.⁷

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ
 ܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ
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 ܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ
 ܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ

"Indeed, natures think that they can see Him whom they have never been able to see. For they looked at these things and, behold, they erred in thinking that God was like themselves. If they had seen Him in Himself it would have been a good thing for them to think they saw Him, but instead of Him they saw themselves and thought that they saw Him. O, the child who touches himself and thinks to himself that he touches the Hidden One!"

Likenesses based on our ability to comprehend must necessarily bear something of us in them. Overdependence on images leads to a false idea of God which has more in common with our nature than God's. If we take them as they are meant, though, they can be helpful.

7. H 27.2

We may now examine some of the similes Ephraem does use to gain a better understanding of this aspect of his theological effort which creates so much ambivalence in this writer. Ephraem makes much use of vivid similes in these writings: there are more than thirty instances of similes or metaphors. They seem to be used more of emphasis than illustration, despite Ephraem's reputation as a theologian who works often through imagery. In other words, these images are usually put forward after a point has been made to offer a striking picture to fix the point in the hearer's mind, rather than being expected to stand on their own as theological exposition. There are a number of topics on which Ephraem makes particularly noteworthy use of this tool:

The first we shall examine is the inherent danger in theological prying:⁸

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"If a blind man should examine a burning coal so that he should touch it, its light will not aid him but its strength will burn him. So would the hidden Being harm the one who investigated it, though it would magnify the one who worshipped it."

ܠܡܕܢܐܢܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܠܐ ܕܥܡܐ
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8. H 5.13.5-11 and H 27.8

ܠܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
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“Lo, the blind in their questioning are like the proud blind man who takes a bow and, with it, shoots arrows into the coals, but is not aware how his arrows are lost. The arrows that he shot in his pride have become ash in the fire, they have become dust in the wind and if it should happen to him that he himself should go up into the fire, then it would be the end of both him and his arrows”.

When these two passages are considered together with the following one a picture will be drawn of the human situation with regard to the approach to God:¹

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“So, if a blind man searches for light, despite the fact that he cannot picture the Sun and its light in his heart or mind, he will not be able to see its light and the offspring of the sun except, only if he believes someone who tells him of it”.

These three passages, viewed together, make clear that Ephraem uses this simile of the difficulties of a blind man to illustrate theological investigation with a very full idea of what

he wishes to communicate and how the simile will aid him. This one image, used three different times, shows that the blind man is not able to profit from the advantages offered by what he seeks, is unable to tell the true result of his actions, and is only able to progress by an act of faith in someone not handicapped as he is. The human situation is shown through the blindness of the man and his consequent unawareness of his true state, his inability to judge his situation is shown by his ignorance of the fate of the arrows he shoots, and the way he can rescue himself is put forward. This one simile thus provides an attack on the position of the Arians (who continue to shoot arrows of theological investigation despite their blindness), provides an explanation as to why they would continue in this unprofitable activity, and offers a way out of the problem by turning to someone who is not blind: God and His Revelation. In the three instances of this simile we are presented with a full rebuttal of the Arian theological effort and provided with an alternative². However, only a Syrian of Ephraem's own day who heard enough of his work to apply a knowledge of it to particular passages, or a reader willing to collate the contents of these hymns, would be able to grasp the full significance this simile carried in the context in which it first appeared. Ephraem is making use of this simile to much more than merely show how difficult theology is. The image is woven into the rest of the thought of these hymns. We must keep this in mind as we look at other similes: our ability to draw meaning from them is not definitive. Now that we have seen how they can be used we should be ready to find in them more than meets the eye at first, and we should be ready to admit that we may not have enough information still surviving to understand them as they were intended.

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2. H 67.4 speaks of the fool who shoots in the dark at what he cannot see as a contrast to the open obvious symbol (or target) of the truth about the Father and the Son. This appears to be a reference to the image of archery by the blind which we have seen Ephraem use to illustrate the incorrect (Arian) response to the problems attendant on theological inquiry. Hymn 67 thus appears to contain a simile implicitly referring to another simile, and should be taken as further proof of the way in which these images form the more tangible counterparts to the doctrines Ephraem is teaching. He recalls the image rather than the doctrine because it is more striking to the average hearer and so more likely to be grasped in a passing reference.

The Cross is another source of images for Ephraem. These similes are not meant to convince the doubtful or enlighten the ignorant, but rather to evoke contemplative response in the faithful and to place the Cross in the midst of creation as a symbol of the omnipresence of salvation. The Cross is likened to a bird in flight³, to the mast and cross spars of a ship⁴, and to a plow⁵. Thus we have land, sea, and air or, one might say: animal creation, agriculture, and maritime culture. The purpose of Ephraem's choices is to show how the Cross can be thought of as represented in *all* sorts of place in the world⁶. His listeners could leave the Church and expect to be reminded of salvation anywhere. This is a perfect example of the simile as emphasis rather than enlightenment, with the emphasis renewed every time an object in the simile is encountered by the listener.

The Trinity also produces images in Ephraem's mind that are calculated to evoke a recollection of the nature of God by means of creation rather than to convince waverers of the accuracy of the Nicene Trinitarian position⁷. The Trinity is found to resemble quite a diverse list of things in the world around us: wheat⁸, an egg⁹, a plant¹⁰, a human being¹¹, and the

3. H 18.2.4 and strophe 6 as well as H 24.8

4. H 18.7

5. H 18.11

6. Yousif (1978) p. 57, makes much of this same point: "Following patristic tradition in general Ephraem shows how, without the sign of the Cross, nothing can be achieved, either in the sky (birds, stanza 6), or on earth (stanza 6), or on the sea (stanzas 7-9), or on earth (stanza 11)." Though Yousif wishes to view this use of the symbol of the Cross as emblematic of its continuing activity in the world beyond Golgotha (p. 58), I prefer to see in it Ephraem's desire to surround his listeners with reminders of his expression of the Christian message, thus continuing their awareness of his teaching, ideally, throughout their daily lives. Where Yousif calls this use of the Cross "The metaphysical function of the sign of the Cross" (p. 57), I would consider it merely an effective tool for instruction.

7. If such a position can be said to exist beyond the denial of any sort of gradation in essence within the Godhead and the insistence on the equal eternity of the Persons.

8. H 42.9

9. H 43.1

10. H 43.4

11. H 73.21

trio of fruit, its tree and the tree root¹². These provide again an assortment of natural and cultivated things, thus including the tamed and untamed parts of creation. So Ephraem wishes his hearers to be reminded of the Trinity all around them, just like the Cross. Again, the spiritual effect of Ephraem's teaching is increased as the variety of his reminders multiplies around the listener.

There are a number of other interesting uses of similes and metaphors in the texts which should be mentioned to give a fuller sense of the way in which Ephraem uses this tool:

In Hymn 36.2 ff. Ephraem tells the gospel story, what we would call the gospel chapter of salvation history, with human beings described as sheep, and with Christ, during His incarnate earthly life, pictured as a sheep. The Jews, those who opposed Him, are then called wolves and are said to have thought Him really to be a sheep because of His being the Paschal Lamb. That is, they thought He really was a human because He was offering Himself for us. (Thus are they deceived in the same way as the Arians of Ephraem's own day.) This not only highlights the condescension of the Son in the Incarnation, but also stresses the evil of those who opposed Him and presents a useful parallel for those who might not understand why a truly divine Christ would be mistaken for anything else. This is also an argument for a full Incarnation because it stresses the complete identification of the divine Son with the human nature.

In Hymn 24.1 Christ's humanity is described as an athlete's armor. In this armor He was girded for battle with Satan. Just as the humanity of Christ served as the bait on the fish hook in Gregory of Nyssa's *Great Cataphetical Oration*, so here the humanity of Christ prepares for and makes possible the salvific triumph. Incarnation is not only a self-limiting, then, but is also an enabling factor in the process of Redemption. This, too, is an illustration of a way in which a full Incarnation could be thought of religious logic.

In Hymn 18.16 conception among birds, thought at that time to take place without physical contact, is put forward as a

12. H 77.12 ff.

type of the conception of Christ by Mary. Again this is not an argument for a position, but rather a mention of something that might be thought useful as a spark to reflection on an imponderable subject.

We will close with a particularly interesting image: that of a ship. This is interesting beyond the others because it is used in two opposed ways to render two opposed messages: in Sermon 2.219 ff. a weak ship foundering is compared to a weak soul, while in Hymn 79.6 the Scripture is compared to a ship which is for a sailor a source of life and security. Thus the same reality becomes the source of opposite images, expressing both dissolution and safety, in the mind of Ephraem, depending on the particular circumstance about which he writes. There could be no clearer evidence of the fact that Ephraem views these similes in a very detached way: not linking a particular reality with something else which it will always be held to illumine, but rather associating things together as the fancy strikes him. Ephraem's similes are fluid and open to change as his needs require or the moment leads him. His images function much as do the image in the Psalms, from which this use of the ship may well stem.¹³ (It is hard to think of a ship as an image in the minds of a church full of Syrians so far from the coast of any open water, though their contact with merchants may have familiarized them with all the various modes of transportation.) The images in the psalms are meant to offer additional power to a point by giving a moving discourse. This is how Ephraem makes use of images: as a tangible addition to a topic which is sometimes too abstruse for comprehension in itself.

We will now examine Ephraem's use of images involving the sun, his most frequent source of similes in these works. Ephraem's use of the sun as a source for images, especially of the divine, is frequent enough to be remarked upon by the casual reader. His willingness to ground in the same likeness a number of different images describing a number of different realities serves well to illustrate the flexibility of his approach to theological exposition.

Ephraem can draw from the sun an image of the distance, and so the difference, separating the created from the divine:¹⁴

13. e. g. Psalm 107

14. H 26.5.1-4

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 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
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"Clearly the sun persuades us, my brothers, that it is harmful to gaze upon the Greatness whose nature is mightier than all mouths and is completely foreign to all tongues.¹⁵"

This distance between the sun and the rest of creation is also used by Ephraem as an illustration of the relationship of the nature of Christ to creation.¹⁶ This example is particularly interesting because it comes just after a description of the closeness of Father to Son. The distance between the sun and the rest of creation thus appears to be archetypal image of separation in the mind of Ephraem. We would expect that Ephraem would choose a particularly strong illustration of separation in order to provide the best possible contrast with the closeness he has just asserted to exist between the Father and Son. The contrast of closeness between Father and Son and distance between Son and creation is one that Ephraem desires to be particularly sharp, since his chief opponents wish to stress the Son's closeness to and membership in the created realm and His distance from the Father. An awareness of this particular tension reinforces our appreciation for Ephraem's confidence in the vividness of the image.

Ephraem also uses the sun to illustrate the relations between the Persons of the Trinity. This is shown at length in Hymns 40, 37 and 74. It is interesting to note, in light of what has just been said about the use of the sun for illustrating the separation of creation from divine (in close concert with a description of the closeness of Father and Son), that Ephraem makes detailed use of the sun to illustrate specifics of the life of the Son.¹⁷

15. Compare also H 4.4.4 ff., H 5.8.2 ff., H 6.2., H 72.22 for much the same sentiments.

16. S 1.157 ff.

17. H 73.12-13 and so to the end. This entrance of the sun into the human eye is compared by Beck (1949) p. 53 with Plato, *Republic* (507-8) as another example of a point of contact between Ephraem and Greek culture.

ܐܡܪ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܐܡܪ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܐܡܪ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
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“While the sun [itself] is among the heavenly things, its heat and brightness are a clear symbol earthly things. Its ray bends down to earth and dwells in the eye just as He put on the body.”

Ephraem puts forward the relation of the sun to its created beholder as so close that the ray enters inside the person.¹⁸ He has thus produced two diametrically opposed points from the same source. The sun, through its ray, is remarkable for its closeness to the onlooker while itself being remarkable for its distance from the rest of creation. The suppleness of Ephraem’s use of the image is reinforced by the fact that he follows this comparison of the sun with the Incarnation by a comparison of the dwelling of the sun in the eye with the dwelling of the Word in Mary’s womb for nine months: both of these being incomprehensible to us.¹⁹ Thus the two different dwellings involved in the Incarnation are both likened to the same aspect of the sun.

If we place alongside these passages the following strophes from Hymn 75,²⁰ where the action of the sun’s heat on water is likened to the action of the divine on the humanity of Christ in the Incarnation, we will gain an even fuller sense of Ephraem’s willingness to find details of likeness in the sun as well as broad likenesses on both ends of the same spectrum:

18. Beck (1981) p. 93 calls attention to the fact that Ephraem doubtless means his listeners to understand the ray to be a metaphor for Christ.

19. idem strophe 15

20. 13–16

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"Heat and wind are divisible despite being strong. Only light, of all created things is not divisible, like its creator. It does not root up and it does not beget, since it has no lack."

The combination of involvement with lower things and lack of contamination by them are the hallmarks shared by the divine and light in Ephraem's mind.

It should be pointed out that these two characteristics are both refutations of Arian assumptions. The Arians would hold that what is lofty in nature cannot be involved with what is more lowly and that it is not possible for what is divine to involve itself with the created without severing its link with the Godhead.²² Thus, both the nature of the connection which Ephraem claims is depicted in some aspects of the sun and the consequences of this connection are bones of contention with the Arians. This is all the more reason for Ephraem to seek out convincing illustrations of his position, since, with the aid of an image like the sun which can illustrate something of the difficult ideas he espouses, Ephraem can hope to win over more adherents to his teaching. As with points of doctrine such as a truly divine yet truly incarnate Word and the mystery of the Trinity, the task of holding two points in tension which tend to counteract each other is often made easier if another instance of the same sort of contradiction can be found. This lessens the feeling of irrationality which attends these formulae and makes them seem clearer. The dual use of the sun in images of closeness and distance can serve as that sort of secondary parallel illustration.

22. cf. Eunomius (1987) *Apol.* 9, p. 42, where this necessary separation of the divine from all else is made clear.

Before we move on to the examination of the christological arguments of each author as a test case of their theological method, we should remind ourselves of what we have seen in this chapter.

Both writers have made use of logical arguments against the Arians. Gregory makes more of linguistic points. Both are quite concerned about the difficulties attendant on the use of similes and symbolic language in theological discourse because of its necessary inadequacy for presenting a full picture of reality, but both are resigned to the necessity of using it. Both use solar images, but Ephraem displays many more of these with much greater variety of content than does Gregory. Both have made use of our lack of knowledge of creation and the inferiority of creation to the divine to emphasize our lack of knowledge of the divine. In Ephraem this constitutes a thread throughout his work, while in Gregory it is found in a long passage at the end of Oration 28.²³ Gregory argues from the tradition of Christian worship which Ephraem, writing pieces specifically for use in worship, oddly neglects.²⁴ Both hold firmly to our inability to comprehend God. This conviction colors everything else they say about theology in the face of opponents who hold the opposite position. They appear to be defending quite similar theological methods, though they do so with slightly different arguments.

23. sections 22-31

24. At least there is little, if any, of it in this collection as it exists today.

CHAPTER VI

CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHING

All adversarial writing which issues from the Arian Controversy centers on Christology. Both the sets of writing under examination in this study follow that pattern. In order to understand these works properly one must try to meet them on their field of primary concern: Christology. This chapter is an examination and comparison of the christological positions put forward in these works by Gregory and Ephraem. In this arena we will be able to see clearly how their ideas and tactics for propounding them converge and diverge.

There are two areas of christological thought to be considered in depicting a coherent Christology: the intra-Trinitarian relation between the Father and the Son and the extra-Trinitarian relations between the incarnate Word as Jesus, on the one hand, and both the Father and the rest of humankind, on the other. Though knowledge of the extra-Trinitarian aspect in the Christian saga is historically prior, because it was shown forth in the life of Christ and depicted in the gospels which are the fount of Christian thought about Christ, while the intra-Trinitarian is made clear only by reflection on those events and the rest of the New Testament, the intra-Trinitarian is logically prior because it is prior in the life of the Son. Since we are trying to show Gregory's understanding of Christ in the clearest fashion possible it makes sense, for our own benefit, to follow the logical order by beginning with his ideas about the Son as a participant in the Godhead.

The intra-Trinitarian side has two particular difficulties with it: it is not buttressed or discussed by the same volume of scriptural texts as the extra-Trinitarian and it is much less easily organized systematically (when it is mentioned or displayed). Gregory's treatment of this area, where Trinitarian and Christological teaching overlap, necessarily reflects these difficulties.

In Or. 29.3 Gregory presents, as a matter of faith, a Trinity with all three persons of equal rank. He will accept nothing other than this expression of the mystery. This conviction brings in its wake a need to demonstrate the rationality of the picture of the Trinity his claims require. An example of the many questions that naturally arise out an attempt to put forward a Godhead of three equals might be: How can three (or two) divinities of the same rank be anything other than the same single God¹?

“Everything which the Father has belongs to the Son, as is also true of the Son’s things for the Father. So nothing is particular [to one] because [all things are] common. So also [their] being itself is common and equal honour, since [it comes] to the Son by means of the Father”.

Gregory must discuss what separates the Persons as well as what they have in common. A balance is needed if he is to hold together his picture of identical divine Persons who are personally distinct. As yet he has not provided this, for he is still at work on the first side of the equation: that of the equality of the Son to the Father.

That Gregory holds to this understanding of the Trinity as a result of the faithful acceptance of what he has been taught, rather than because of a reasoning process, is shown in the last oration where he argues against the most widely known of Arian contentions: “There was a time when He was not²”. “There was

1. Or. 30.11.7-10

2. Wolfson (1970) p. 586, points out that Philo, *De Decalogo* 12,58, says of the world: “There was a time when it was not.” It may well be no coincidence that this earlier Alexandrian writer had used Arius’ defining phraseology before him, though we need not insist that Arius knew the source of the quotation, if he did, indeed, hear it bruited about at some point. Wolfson also notes that another Alexandrian, Origen, with whom Arius was certainly familiar, expressly denied this period of non-existence to the Son. (*De Prin.* IV, 4, I) “numquam fuit quando non fuit.” We should never think that Arius’ concerns came out of the blue to him alone. If Origen spoke against a point of view, one could safely assume it was held by someone at the time. Arius was a new persuasive voice, but not necessarily an innovator. cf. R. Williams (1987) esp. pp. 85 ff. for an exposition of Arius as “an anachronism” rather than an innovator.

a time when He did not exist'', with an extended plea for the need to keep all three Persons in a Trinity of equal rank or the divinity will be lost³.

“If there was [a time] when the Father was not, then there was [a time] when the Son was not. If there was [a time] when the Son was not, then there was [a time] when the Spirit was not. If one [of them] has existed ‘from the beginning’, then [all] three have. If you cast one [of them] down, I make bold to say that you do not raise up on high the [other] two. What is the advantage of an imperfect divinity? Or, rather: what is divinity, if it is imperfect? How is it perfect if it lacks [something for perfection? For it is somehow lacking if it should not have holiness. For how would it have [holiness], if it does not have [the Spirit]? Either holiness is something other than this (and let him say [what it is] if anyone should know what this is), or, if it is the same thing as this, how does it not exist ‘from the beginning’? (as if it were better for God to be imperfect at one time and apart from the Spirit!). For if it has not existed ‘from the beginning’, then it is ranked alongside me, albeit a little bit ahead of me. For we [human beings] are separated from God by time. If it is ranked alongside me, how can it make me God, or how can it join me to the Godhead?”

This argument of Gregory's for the inclusion of the Holy Spirit as an equal in a Triune Godhead, is very revealing of his approach to the discussion of the nature of divinity itself. Gregory admits no intermediate state between divinity and being created. This argument is directed against Arian attempts to grant some of the attributes of divinity to the Son while not granting Him true divine status.⁴ In the passage quoted above, rather than accept the validity of an argument on where the Son (and Spirit) belong in the cosmos, Gregory catches at an attribute of the Son

3. Or. 31.4

4. e. g. Eunomius (1987) *Apology* 28.19-24 “Hence, there is ‘one God’, unbegotten, uncreated, unmade, and ‘one Lord, Jesus Christ’, the Son of God, the offspring of the Unbegotten (but not like any other offspring), the creature of the Uncreated (but not like any other creature), the ‘thing made’ of the Unmade (but not like any other ‘thing made’), just as Holy Scripture proclaims: ‘The Lord created me as the beginning of his ways, before eternity he set me up, before all the hills he brought me forth.’”

or Spirit which he feels he can claim as divine beyond argument and, by pointing to this distinguishing characteristic, feels that he has demonstrated the necessity of acknowledging the fully divine status of the Person to whom the characteristic refers. The passage above, though spoken in support of the claim of the Holy Spirit to full divine status, is applicable to the Son's condition as well. It rests entirely on the equation of 'Holy Spirit' with Spirit as such. Though not an argument of great theological force, it is likely to be the sort of riposte which Gregory's audience would appreciate and one which the Arians would be hard put to counter.⁵ The spinning out of an argument that the 'Holy Spirit' and 'Spirit' are not necessarily the same is not likely to be attended to by someone who is not a professional theologian. That sort of argument all too easily takes on the aura of special pleading. Gregory has grasped boldly at a connection which the neo-Arians cannot successfully refute and has done so without the support of any very impressive thought. It is the bold theologian who can do so much with so little: counting on nothing more, really, than the general piety of the laity and their desire not to tear at their understanding of the divine, or, indeed, risk their hope of heaven.⁶ Gregory has managed to make his picture of the Godhead seem the *sine qua non* for guarding the hope of salvation: if he can do that convincingly, the argument is won.

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5. Gregory's argument, to be effective, depends upon the hearer acquiescing in the linking of the three Persons together. Gregory has drawn on Scripture texts which he thinks present both Son and Spirit as divine and then attempts to link their divine status together and to that of the Father. In fact, there is no reason this should be so. Gregory counts on his listeners to feel that the divine is under attack by the Arians and must be defended and then tries to use citations from Scripture to include the Son and Spirit in that protected category. The careful reader will note that there is nowhere a case made that all three Persons stand and fall together. That, for Gregory, is a conviction rather than a conclusion reached by argument.
 6. Gallay (1978), note 2, p. 283, notes the connection between this argument of Gregory's based on the function of the Spirit in sanctifying us and that of Athanasius based on the function of the Son as incarnate Christ: e. g. *Or. 2 c. Ar. sec. 70* (lines 11-21) PG 26.296: "A Human being joined to a created thing could not have been divinized unless the Son was true God. The human being would not have been nigh the Father unless the word truly His [the Father's] by nature had put on the body. Likewise, we would not have been freed from sin and curse [s] unless the flesh which the World put on was human by nature, for we have nothing in common with another [sort of flesh]. In this way, a human being coul

Gregory's awareness that it is his picture of the Trinity which is the decisive factor in his argument is demonstrated at Or. 29.3 where he begins by baldly stating against the most famous Arian rallying cry: "There was not [a time] when He was not." but ends the section with a clear, rational argument that eternality and being without cause are not to be confused. The combination of the approaches is meant to reach different segments of the audience and to supply the listeners with memorable phrases to take with them out of the church. Gregory is able to see the sticking point his rousing claims bring up and is willing to treat it intelligently.

In fact, Gregory proceeds to discuss the value of language (e.g. the term 'begetting') appropriate to the physical creation for describing the divine. Gregory is considering the intellectual as well as the popular aspects of persuasion by including these more technical points in the same argument along with his fine phrases. It is not likely that the same sections of the congregation were the intended targets of these two angles of approach.

We should not think of the Arian arguments against which Gregory strives as being without merit. It is not only because of the desires of the audience that Gregory decides to include the various elements of his argument; it is also because of the power of his opponents' case. Indeed, there is evidence, even in this strictly christological realm of the orations, that Gregory felt constrained to reply directly to some of their objections.

The Arians did not accept the idea of divine 'generation' in the same way their opponents did because of the word's corporal application in the human and animal worlds. Wishing to keep the divinity separated from all taint of lower things, they strove to do away with this sort of talk about God. Forced by its presence in Scripture⁸ to accept it in some fashion, they chose

not be divinized unless the Word which became flesh truly and properly belonged to the Father by nature." Athanasius' argument seems equally unanswerable in the situation in which it was presented. What fourth century congregation would cast away what was persuasively put to them as their hope of salvation?

7. Or. 29.4

8. e. g. *Jn* 1:14

to take its use in the case of the Son as evidence of His inhabiting a lower ontological level than the Father. Since the true divinity, in their minds, did not have any involvement in coming into being or change, the begetting of the Son was proof of His inferiority.⁹ Gregory, of course, holds to the term, as he also must because of Scripture, but cannot accept the Arian assessment of its meaning.

He begins to counter it by denying its corporal provenance.¹⁰

“How is generation not involved in passions? Because it is incorporeal. If a bodily generation involves the passions, then an incorporeal one is passionless.”

This takes away the aspect of the word that is awkward and leaves ‘begetting’ as an indicator of a close connection between Father and Son. Gregory, a few sections later, refuses to be drawn into a discussion of the precise meaning of the word ‘begotten’ in the Son’s case:¹¹

“Let the generation of God be honored by silence. It is a great thing for you to learn that He is begotten. We should

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9. It is important to remember that, in the passage from Eunomius’ *Apology* quoted above in note 4, the special status granted to the Son among the offspring of God: “but not like any other offspring” was meant to raise His status above the rest, not to lower it. That passage seeks to establish an intermediate position for Christ, between God and creation. The Arian reading of the term ‘beget’ is not a twisting of it. They view it in the context of their belief in the perfect unchangeability of the divine and so are bound to place the Son outside the divine on this account. The Nicenes read the term in the context of their conviction of the full divinity of Christ and so see it as a key proof the organic and substantial link between Son and Father. These are both reasonable positions reached in good faith. The point to be taken from the contrast is the degree to which one’s philosophical and theological presuppositions can control even honest reverent attempts to draw truth from Scripture. It was not possible for either side to see anything other than what they habitually saw in *Jn* 1:14 and other verses like it because they did not look beyond the obvious reading that occurred to them and fitted their schemes without effort.
10. Or. 29.4. 1–2 Beck (1949) p. 68 notes that Ephrem does not make this distinction between divine and human generation a part of his anti-Arian argument, but relies on his denial of their claim: “There was [a time] when He was not.”
11. Or. 29.8.25–27

concede that not even the angels know *how* this happens, and certainly not you!"

He accepts this term grants it to have meaning, but will not dishonour it by prying into what the meaning is. At this point, the utility of 'begotten' in theological discourse is uncertain, to say the least. Its presence is required but its meaning unattainable: what is the lesson to be learned from that? The lesson, Gregory proclaims, is in the closeness of Son to Father.¹²

If it is a great thing for the Father not to have His beginning in anyone, then it is not less for the Son to have His beginning from such a Father. For He participates in the glory of the Uncaused because He is from the Uncaused, and there is added to that [the glory] of the begetting, which is an extremely honourable thing to those who are not wholly earth-bound and fleshly in their thinking'.

Though we cannot know the nature of the closeness between the Father and the Son, its existence is enough to convince us that we should not consign the Son to a secondary rank.

Thus the intra-Trinitarian side of Christology yields a conviction of closeness to the point of identity between the Father and the Son, but does not address the matter of how that closeness is to be articulated beyond the use of the term 'begetting'. This closeness is a revealed mystery, shown to us in Scripture, and must be accepted as such. With this, Gregory rests content.

It is in the realm of extra-Trinitarian Christology that the real battle is waged, of course,¹³ and so it is in this realm that we must look for the key to Gregory's teaching on Christ.

12. Or 29.11.21-26

13. It is true that without a proper intra-Trinitarian picture of the relation of Son to Father it would not be possible to arrive at a Christology Gregory would find acceptable. The Trinitarian assumption would veto the necessary understanding of the gospels. It is safe to say, however, that the engine which moves Christology is not found in the intra-Trinitarian realm, logically prior to Christology though it may be, but rather in the Christology that springs from reading the gospels themselves. So, despite a systematizer's urge to treat this second section as secondary, it is, in fact, primary in both temporal terms and in terms of piety. Reading the New Testament is

The chief difficulty which confronts the writer trying to understand the gospel witness to Christ is how to make sense of the variety of things said in Scripture about Him and the variety of actions and words credited to Him.

It is clear, to begin with, that Gregory takes to heart his own advice on the proper reading of christological passages in Scripture.¹⁴ He is willing to speak of the incarnate Christ as a human being¹⁵ when comparing Him to the Father as well as to make an explicit equation of the incarnate Christ with the Son as one of the Trinity.¹⁶

“The one who is now despised by you was once above you. The one who is now human was also incomposite. What He was, He remained, and what He was not, He took on. In the beginning He existed without cause (for what is the cause of God?), but later He was born for a cause. The cause was that you, insolent one, should be saved, you who because of this despise the divinity because it took on your gross nature, mingling with the flesh through the medium of the mind. The lowly human being became God because it was mingled with God and became one, while the stronger [nature] was victorious [over the sinful tendencies of the weaker nature], so that I might become as much God as He became human.”

The willingness to speak in this manner, referring to both the divine and human natures as the same ‘He’, of Christ is indicative of Gregory’s understanding of the incarnate Christ. He does not see Christ merely as a man divinized or sanctified by contact with the divine,¹⁷ or merely as the divine among us in physical form,¹⁸ but rather as both at once. Thus Gregory is able to frame an aphorism on the nature of Christ which

the primary theological act of Christianity, in this age after the fixing of the Canon, and should be regarded as such. It certainly was so regarded by Gregory. His manner of arguing and use of texts reveals it.

14. e.g. Or. 30.1.8–11

15. Or. 30.7.14–16

16. Or. 29.19.1–10

17. though he says precisely this at Or. 30.21.13–15

18. Though that is surely the picture put forward by Or. 29.19.1–10 just quoted, which makes the divinity the active force in Christ with the humanity receiving the action

simultaneously speaks of the one individual in His human and divine aspects:¹⁹

“Fatherless hence [on earth] and motherless thence [in heaven] ”

This is the sort of extraordinarily vivid statement that Gregory loves. It is also a shocking thing to hear for anyone who wishes to keep separate the divine and the earthly. That Gregory, who was steeped as much as anyone in his age in the philosophical tradition which would require such a separation, would fly in its face in this manner is witness to his determination to put what he finds in Scripture ahead of whatever other considerations might apply to the question at hand. Rather than attempt a solution of the problem posed by a Savior both divine and human which would provide a single understanding of the person of Christ fit for all occasions (which is the sort of solution for which his opponents strove), Gregory was willing to accept both the divine and human forms of reference to Christ as legitimate in their own spheres. Indeed, this separation of reference to the humanity and divinity of Christ extends far enough to permit Gregory to distinguish them even in the same act.²⁰

“Is it not clear to all, that He knows as God and that He says He does not know as a human, should one [wish to] divide the visible from what is grasped by the mind?”

For the same thinker to be willing to accept a picture tending so much toward division in Christ and also to put forward statements so striking in the degree of unity they display in Christ,²¹ requires that a clear picture of what he wishes to express be present in his mind, and that his desire to communicate this picture take precedence over his desire to seek out a solution with verbal or formal consistency. Gregory has a number of truths about Christ he wishes to convey and he expresses each one with the greatest degree of clarity he can achieve. His picture of Christ is the sum of these aspects

19. Or. 29.19.12

20. Or. 30.15.14-16

21. such as Or. 29.19.1-10 quoted above

when each is taken in context. He is not attempting one unified expression of the reality of the Person of Christ, for he knows that that is not possible. The sense that Gregory makes of the variety of the scriptural witness to Christ is not one that explains away one set of texts or one that tries to unify them all as if they all said the same thing. Rather, Gregory wishes to accept the validity of each one and accept each one's meaning. The resultant picture is not smooth, admittedly, but is rather a patchwork of vivid images. Gregory began this attempt from the conviction that he could not express the relationship between Father and Son, which is the actual content of any Christology, and so has settled for expressing the aspects of the revealed truth which do lie within his grasp. Beyond this, he must trust, as do his hearers, that the fragments will lead serious believers to advance beyond them on their own and so draw closer to that goal they can never reach.

We must realize what a typical approach to argumentation this is for a person raised at the center of Greek education like Gregory. To set aside coherence, even a false, merely linguistic coherence, and to settle on purpose on a teaching that is self-contradictory and incompletely expressed is a repudiation of everything Gregory had been trained to hold dear in the years he spent in Athens with Basil. Gregory was not a failure as a student and he was surely not a rebel, seeking to fight against what he was taught. We must conclude, then, that his mental picture of what he wished to teach, and his conviction of that picture's truth, were strong enough to make him throw over his training and cling to the message he proclaimed. This, in itself, is an extremely important insight the way in which his method of theological argumentation was affected by his Christian faith.

What, then, has this Christ to do with us? How are human beings affected? The importance of Christology lies in its implications for the salvation offered by the faith it propounds; only by a Christology's teaching on the question of the relation of Christ's person and work to us human beings can it be fairly assessed.

The first of the consequences of the Incarnation in Gregory's mind is that it makes possible some degree of theological success.²²

"When I looked I barely saw the hind-parts of God, [by] sheltering behind that rock, [that is] the Word made flesh for us."

Not only is the Incarnation the heart of Christology and so of the Christian Faith,²³ but it is what makes reasoned articulation of the upper reaches of the Faith possible. It is thus, both what is expressed and the enabler of the expression. If one is reminded that the author of this sentiment was a highly trained adept in pagan philosophical reasoning, it becomes all the more astonishing that he would claim that the possibility of success in the quest, the chance to draw near to God, has only been offered as the result of the Incarnation. This places the incarnate Christ at the beginning as well as the end of the theological quest. 'Philosophy'²⁴ has become wholly Christian. We are able to draw near enough to God to see His hind-parts (the best we could hope for) because we can draw near to Christ as one of our own and then peek over His shoulder at the Father Who is one of His own. The dual nature of Christ as human and divine is clearly seen at work in this.

Knowledge is vouchsafed to us as a result of the Incarnation, but that is not the most notable of its results. Gregory has a very clear idea of what the Incarnation offers us and what sort of connection is forged between the Son and the human race by it. More than merely earning the right to be considered one of us, Christ has earned the right to stand in our place by His taking on of human nature.²⁵

"As I said, in Himself He represents our [nature]. We were formerly left aside and overlooked but now we are taken up and saved by the sufferings of the Impassible."

22. Or. 28.3.5-7

23. It certainly was the heart of the Arian Controversy. Indeed, it would not be misleading to say that the Arian Controversy was primarily an argument over the proper understanding of the incarnate Christ, though it involved a wide range of areas in Christian theology and philosophy before the root cause of it was fully thrashed out.

24. in the late antique sense of: the rational reflective quest for truth

25. Or. 30.5.26-29

So complete is His assumption of our nature that His experiences can be understood as touching us all.²⁶ The shock of the impassible entering willingly into the physical realm is well recompensed by the great dividends accrued from this self-emptying.

We must always recall the shock inflicted on the contemporary mind (that is, the mind of a person raised in the ancient world) by the idea of the divine submitting to the finite. This overthrows every pious and philosophical instinct of that age. Gregory, brought up in this set of assumptions, surely felt the scandal as much as anyone.²⁷ Yet he accepts it boldly and, by stating the cause of the Incarnation to be the working out of our salvation, he turns the shock from being one of horror at the abasement of God to being one of grateful wonder at the depth of the love of God.²⁸

“What is the cause of the humanity which God submitted to for our sake? It was completely to save us, what else?”

“He was enslaved by our flesh, birth and passions for the sake of our freedom, by all those things to which those whom He saved were bound by sin. What could be greater for human lowliness than to be woven to God and to *become* God from the mixing...?”

26. This surely is an implicit avowal of the idea of Christ as the new Adam. He is the representative human of this new age as Adam was of the age between the Fall and the birth of Christ. This is a natural concomitant of the idea of the remaking of human nature through Christ.

27. Indeed, a full appreciation for this scandal is necessary for a full appreciation of the import of what the doctrine of the Incarnation attempts to express. There are, actually, rather few theologians in Christian history, compared to the large number of writers the Church has produced, who explicitly take not of this scandal and also hold to it without flinching. This has always been, and continues to be, a point of decision for Christian writers. It is not correct to assume that all who accept the idea of ‘incarnation’ forge on to the logical conclusion of a real union of God and Man or a real entry of the divine into creation. Gregory is remarkable, in this regard, for his willingness to accept the difficulty fully.

28. Or. 30.2.17–18 and Or. 30.3.3–7 See also Or. 30.21.34–35 where the Son is said to have descended for us, and Or. 30.6.24–30 where the wonder of the Incarnation is clearly stated. For example, lines 25–26: “It is a greater thing for Him to be pursued than for us to be caught...” The marvel is in the submission of the divine to the vagaries of life within creation.

These instances of the same point being reiterated in the same oration serve to underline the importance of the idea in Gregory's mind. In the midst of an argument over whether or not the Son is fully divine and so whether or not the divine nature in Jesus Christ was fully divine, Gregory is more than usually aware of the disturbing nature of what he wishes to profess. His method of rendering it acceptable to his listeners is not to change the content of his message or to veil it in images or unclear language, it is, rather, to tie the Incarnation to our salvation as both cause and instrument. Again Gregory has chosen the most effective means of rendering his position palatable to his hearers. He has held out for a full Incarnation and presented it as necessary for the salvation of human beings. He offers also a vivid image of how it is achieved in the person of Jesus Christ.²⁹

"As the 'form of a servant' He descended to His fellow servants and slaves and took a form foreign to Himself, bearing me [i.e. human nature] entirely within Himself, along with those things proper to me, so that He might use up the baser things inside Himself as a fire consumes wax or the sun [burns off] the mist from the ground. I also partake of the things proper to Him as a result of the mixture."

The physical presence of each nature is clearly displayed by Gregory's words here. The "mixture" of which he speaks is that of divine and human. What could be more appropriate than this as an image to the mind of anyone holding that the great distinction between infinite and finite was that between the incorporeal and the corporeal? Yet Gregory emphasizes this joining of opposites and claims it as the means by which Christian salvation is achieved. This is a tactic akin to his challenging claims on behalf of the Holy Spirit which Gregory puts forward in Oration 31:³⁰ it is meant to challenge the opponent and throw him into the defensive by its very abruptness. The unexpected is not only accepted by Gregory but is made into a central strand in the pattern of his Christology. The strength of the tactic in the hands of a speaker

29. Or. 30.6.7-12

30. e. g. sec. 10 where he baldly states that Spirit is God and consubstantial with the Father and Son.

who is able to make his claims convincing is very great. Gregory succeeds with it by painting convincing pictures of the way salvation is worked out according to his model. Once this image of the salvific process is taken into his hearers' minds, Gregory's opponents will have terrible difficulty dislodging it. Once again, soteriology is the key to a clinching argument.

Gregory's sense of the dual nature of Christ is so strong that he is led by it to accept the use of terms for Christ which others of his time would shy away from as too abrupt. A good example is found in his interpretation of *I Tim.* 2:5³¹.

'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;' He still presides over our salvation now as a human being, because He is still with body which He assumed so that He might make me God by the power of the Incarnation, even if He is no longer known according to the flesh. [By 'flesh'] I mean to say our fleshly passions, except for sin''.

Gregory sees in St. Paul's use of *anthropos* "human being" for Christ the license to grant Him full membership in both of classes to which His natures belong. He is divine as the Son and human as Jesus Christ. The connection accomplished in His person makes possible, even accomplishes,¹ this salvation which must be acted out by the divine upon the human. In an echo of Athanasius, Gregory claims the result of the Son's becoming human to be our acquisition of the ability to become divine. So Gregory is able to anchor these claims in Scripture and even to find scriptural precedent for his willingness to call the Son human and Jesus Christ divine. This, together with his linking of this christological model to the working out of salvation, gives him a strong hand in his efforts to make his own christological scheme seem the only one a serious Christian could accept.

Ephraem's Christological Thought

As with Gregory, we will undertake an investigation of the intra-Trinitarian aspect of Ephraem's christological thought first.

31. Or. 30.14. 7-13. *I Tim.* 2:5 is as follows: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus".

1. cf. Or. 30.21. 13-15 where divine nature is said to sanctify the human by its presence alone.

סוף אדם חסדו וחסדו אדם
 אדם אדם אדם אדם
 אדם אדם אדם אדם

“Mingled with Him and divided from Him, He [Son] is within Him [the Father] and on His right hand. For, if He were not mingled with Him His beloved [Son] could not be in His midst, and if He were not distinct from Him He could not sit at His right hand. He is mingled with Him because He is in His midst and divided from Him because He is on His right hand. One are they in one will, but they are two in their two names: they do not have two wills, but they do have two names”.

The distinction is founded on the basis of their individual existences, their names, and not on the level of will. The paradox of distinction and joining is necessary for Ephraem to express the dual aspect of the relation of Father to Son which he feels is required by the Christian proclamation. The repetitive nature of the passages allows Ephraem to stress the facts he feels sure of: the joining and the separation. He reiterates them in close succession, hoping that this will serve as indication of their equal validity. He has not discovered, so far as we have seen, a way in which to express them both at once, but he has made clear the central outline of the position he holds. It is already quite distinct from that of his opponents.

Along with these more general claims are specific mentions of Arian teaching about the Son. One involves a direct denial of the central Arian claim, in the midst of a Trinitarian passage asserting the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to be like that of the sun, its light and its warmth:⁵

ⲛⲓ ⲁⲩⲱⲧⲉ ⲙⲏ ⲡⲓⲥⲟⲗⲓ ⲙⲏ ⲡⲓⲃⲱⲧⲉ
ⲙⲏ ⲡⲓⲣⲓⲥⲱⲧⲉ “There was never a time for Him when He was
not,” which is a direct echo of a famous phrase also found in

5. H 40.1.4: "There was a time when. He was not": found in too many places to gauge its source, but also in the letter of George of Laodicea to Alexander quoted in Harnack (1903) vol. IV note 2 pp. 16-17. Beck (1981) p. 29 points out that Athanasius *Or. c. Arianos* II. 33 and II. 41 made use of this same solar image to rebut the Arian subordinationism.

Gregory⁶ as well as throughout the literature of the period, and the other a complaint about the Arians' equivocal use of terms, e.g.:⁷

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܚܠܐ ܠܐ ܕܢܚܠܐ "a creature but not like a creature"
and ܕܢܚܠܐ ܕܢܚܠܐ ܠܐ ܕܢܚܠܐ "an offspring but not like a son".

The detail of the confrontation is a clear indication of at least some exact knowledge of Arian teaching on Ephraem's part. Ephraem's claims about the Son must thus be read in this light. He is well aware of the argument in which he is involved and must be understood against that background. We must consider his whole work as having been produced in the context of doctrinal difficulty and struggle. Ephraem is a part of the great Church.⁸ His response to these Arian statements does not only lead him to portray the Son in His relations to the Father. He goes on to show that He has other qualities beyond this: He is the creator,⁹ and Ephraem says of Him:¹⁰ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܚܠܐ ܠܐ ܕܢܚܠܐ "He is God over the creatures". This should be seen as meant to counteract the above 'a creature but not like a creature' of the Arians, Ephraem wants the Son to be acknowledged to be in the Godhead, not as part of creation.

Having shown us that the Son has close relations with the Father and stands in relation to us as divine, Ephraem also shows how the Son can take on the role of the representative or embodiment of the Father for us:¹¹ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܚܠܐ ܠܐ ܕܢܚܠܐ
"In His Son He came to us."

6. Or. 29.3.3 We should recall that Gregory also presents a direct denial of this Arian claim in lieu of an argument against it. Both audiences, we presume, had heard the point belabored before.

7. H 61.9.1-2

8. There is a desire, or perhaps merely a habit, nurtured by lack of linguistic training, to consider Ephraem beyond the range of much of the active intellectual life of the Church of his day. R. P. C. Hanson was able to write an 800-page work on the Arian Controversy without once mentioning Ephraem's name in text or footnote. I think these few evidences of exact knowledge of Arian teaching should be enough to make clear that this custom is not founded in fact. Ephraem has the same right to be considered a disputant in the great controversy of his time as any other author of works which touch on the subject.

9. H 6.6.1-2

10. H 73.6

11. H 63.13.3

Bound to the Father yet distinct from Him, creator of the creation and God over it, the Son is also the vehicle of the coming of the Father to us in the Incarnation. Ephraem has extended the relation of Father to Son outwards to the point of our being included in its effects. We have stepped beyond the bounds of merely intra-Trinitarian Christology and have entered into the consideration of the Son's relation *to us* as shown forth in the Scripture and the Church's teaching. We have reached the second crux of any christological picture, having been pulled along by the expanding range of Ephraem's picture of the Son.

The first principle to which Ephraem clings in his description of the incarnate Christ, the extra-Trinitarian aspect of Christology, is a very strong identity of subject between the Son as one of the Trinity and the Son as Jesus Christ:¹²

ܠܡܝܢ ܐܒܝ ܐܝܬܝܢ
ܐܡܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ

"The light entered into the womb, put on the body and came forth."

This leads the reader to an understanding of the paradoxes inherent in the proclamation of an incarnate deity.¹³

ܠܡܝܢ ܐܒܝ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ
ܐܡܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ
ܐܡܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ
ܐܡܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ

[Coming] from the mighty rich womb and enriching all, you grew in the poor womb of Mary. You had a mortal father on earth since you, who give life to all, were alive."

The wonder of this never pales for Ephraem, who found the greatest instance of God's mercy in what the Arians found to be the irrational claims of their Nicene opposition. Ephraem expresses this paradox many times in the course of these hymns

12. H 4.2.10-11

13. H 24.3

and strains without tiring that he has exhausted the subject and without satisfying his desire to grasp its essence. For example:⁴⁴

ܐܢܬ ܐܬܐ ܕܢܐ ܕܡܠܐܕ ܐܬܐ ܕܢܐ ܕܡܠܐܕ
 ܐܢܬ ܐܬܐ ܕܢܐ ܕܢܐ ܕܢܐ ܕܢܐ ܕܢܐ ܕܢܐ ܕܢܐ ܕܢܐ ܕܢܐ
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"You are the Son of the living [God] and the son of a mortal. You are the Son of our creator, Lord, who established all through you, and you are also the son of Joseph the carpenter who learned from you. In you, without instruction, the creator established all things and by your finger the creator constructed all His creatures. By means of you also did Joseph construct his carpentry, who saw that you were his master".

This is an extraordinary picture that Ephraem paints. The Son is the means of creation on the both the cosmic and the human scales. Ephraem emphasises the reality of the Incarnation by calling the Christ the son of Joseph, highlighting the duality of His nature through this duality of His fathers rather than relying on his earlier contrast of Christ as son of Mary with Him as Son of the Father to make that point, but also stresses the divine role played by the incarnate Christ through mention of His role as the source of all human knowledge in His providing of instruction to Joseph in his handicraft. We should note that this passage always speaks of Christ primarily as the Son of the Father, even in the midst of mentioning His connection with Joseph. This serves to emphasise the identity of subject between the Son before Incarnation and Jesus after it.

The difficulty of classifying Christ as either divine or human, though admitting that He has rights to inclusion in both realms, is taken up directly as a philosophical problem by Ephraem.¹⁵

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“Look at the First-Born, who is different from His fellows and distinguished from His servants. For He is lofty and lowly: He is raised up above the servants and placed down below His fellows [in the Trinity]. He is not counted among the servants nor is He reckoned with His two fellows up above. He is not a servant because He is the Son, but He is not a fellow [member of the Trinity] because He is the First-Born.”

Ephraem confronts the difficulty here without any evocative language to smooth it over. He is aware of the intellectual difficulty involved in attempting to formulate a satisfactory way of speaking about the relation between Jesus and the Son and their common identity. As is often the case in the framing of paradoxes, the drawing of objections is much clearer and simpler than the framing of their solutions. Ephraem displays than a sure grasp of the intellectual difficulties imposed by Christ's dual nature. Such an understanding carries with it the realization that the problem is not likely to be easily overcome.

15. H 6.12

Ephraem's dispassionate description of it here is an illustration of what lies at the back of his similes. The images he uses elsewhere are not thrown up from an inchoate swirl of thoughts, but rather represent a considered attempt to state the positive side of the negative which we see here so clearly drawn.

Ephraem does, of course, make positive statements about the nature of Christ beyond those imbedded in his similes. He is not loathe to offer what he can in the way of hard facts. The paradox is not overcome by these, but it is at least drawn more clearly, and so, perhaps, may be better appreciated. The two births of the Son, the eternal begetting and the human birth from Mary, are a good example of his emphasis on the identity of subject in the Son's life as a proof for the fundamental teaching of his Christology.¹⁶ Along the same lines as this lies Ephraem's insistence that, although the Son truly does experience human life yet He is, at the same time, never really a human being in all senses of the word.¹⁷

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ܡܢ ܠܒܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܡܢ ܠܒܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܡ

"For His conception was confined within the womb, and also within the midst of the world [was] His begetting. For behold, the conception limited Him: behold, the birth limited Him. Death limited Him, and burial and resurrection, indeed by these was He limited."

The fullness of His entering into the human experience is shown by the above, but the instrumental nature of the Incarnation is made clear as well, as it was by Gregory.¹⁸ Ephraem insists that the Incarnation was undergone for a purpose and must be seen in light of that purpose. He is not

16. H 26.2, H 65.3.1-2, H 6.12

17. H 28.6.3-7 but see also H 77.24-25

18. H 24.1

interested in being side-tracked into a picturesque and sentimental drawing out of the degrading aspects of this self-limiting on the part of the truly divine Son: Ephraem wishes to demonstrate that the nature of the salvation offered was the reason for the Incarnation. This is the reason for Christ's humanity being likened to an athlete's armor.¹⁹ Armor was not designed for show and was notoriously uncomfortable, but was necessary for the successful completion of the task at hand. This is how Ephraem wishes us to think of the humanity of Christ. We will see him elsewhere point to the role that God's desire that we use our free will played in shaping the course of the working out of salvation.²⁰ Here we see that this tendency to distinguish means from ends is always with Ephraem.

A very important conclusion should be drawn from this Ephraem's willingness to ascribe some circumstances of the Incarnation to the requirements of the situation is a decisive indication of His willingness to allow for God's submission of Himself to the created realm. The logic behind this acquiescence to the created world is, that is every detail of the Incarnation took place according to a particular desire of God to communicate to us by significant action, then the entire process is carried out on His terms alone. However, if there are elements of Christ's human experience which comply with the nature of the created world rather than the wishes of the divine as such, then the divine in Christ is truly reacting to and being affected by the circumstances of the Incarnation. By allowing for this, Ephraem is, in fact, holding to a completely and shockingly full Incarnation.²¹ Thus can we read a passage in which the sufferings of Christ are ascribed to the human body and not feel that Ephraem is attempting to avoid a full involvement of the divine in creation, but rather to explain how such an involvement could take place.²²

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19. H 24.1

20. H 31.5.1-4

21. We should recall that this was a striking feature of Gregorp's picture of the Incarnation too. Our reading of all christological passage is naturally affected by such a comparison.

22. H 29.2

ܠܡܥܢ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ
 ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ
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"For the body, which He descended and put on, was weak and His deeds and names were appropriate to it. As it was necessary that He should be hungry, so was it also necessary for Him to pray: while, as all His hunger belonged to the body, so did all of His neediness belong to it as well".

The primary effect of this distinction is a division between what the gospels portray as happening to Christ and what Ephraem is willing to admit happened to the Word of God.²¹

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"You have been diminished from your [true] essence and you have grown from it. You have grown small because you sank down from that greatness [of yours] and you have grown greater because you had mercy and created creatures. You became smaller outwardly and you grew outwardly, but it did not happen [to you] essentially. Your glory shrank and grew but your nature remained constant and above the changes."

Notice that this change is described as being the result of the actions of the Son in creation and in the Incarnation. That is, these changes are instrumental to the accomplishing of God's will, just as the body was shown to be above. It is this equivalence between the human body of Christ and the

description of the changes in the Incarnation which do not affect the Son's nature which makes clear that Ephraem is attempting to describe the mechanism of the Incarnation as much as he is attempting to safeguard the unchangeability of the Son. The two go hand in hand, of course, but in the context of christological thought, in Ephraem's mind, the question of a proper expression of the Incarnation seems to arise on the level of the attempt to describe the working through of the process rather than on the level of metaphysics.

Ephraem has shown himself to be perfectly well aware of the philosophical difficulties inherent in the Nicene Christology, but it is not that which is uppermost in his mind. His chief concern seems to be with the effort to describe the truth of Christ as he sees it, rather than to address the intellectual conundrum it presents. Ephraem is not an iconoclast: he has no desire to upset the accepted understanding of the relations possible between the finite and the infinite, but he does intend to try to express the person of Christ within that framework as best he can.²⁴

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ܐܢܬܝ ܐܢܬܝ ܐܢܬܝ ܐܢܬܝ ܐܢܬܝ

"He was limited because He was a human being, but His nature had no limit because He was God."

The distinction between nature and person here is along the lines of that proposed by Gregory for the Trinity²⁵ and is an echo of Ephraem's own passage from Hymn 32 quoted above. Ephraem endeavors to explain how an infinite being could have an experience of the finite and is caught up short by the poverty of language and the inability of his mind to hold together two contrarp notions at the same time without it issuing in a paradox. The competing realities are each given its due, but the attempt to hold the two in balance cannot be said to succeed. Ephraem is driven by this difficulty to the last ditch and embarks on the only path left to him: he begins to ascribe to the humanity and divinity of Christ the attributes and experiences which properly

24. H. 29.3.7-8

25. 31.9

belong to the other as a rhetorical device to create the impression of a single individual despite his admissions that each nature cannot cross the bounds it inhabits.

A sense of wonder at the great humility demonstrated in the Son's saving us is not lacking in Ephraem despite his predominant interest in its functional purpose.²⁶

ܠܗܘܬܠܠܝܐ ܠܡܢ ܕܢܠܕ; ܠܐ ܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ
ܠܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ ܠܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ
ܠܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ ܠܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ
ܠܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ ܠܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ

"The Lord of Heaven came down and sojourned. He became a sojourner, dweller and traveller so that He might take us up and make us dwell in His kingdom, in an everlasting dwelling place".

Christ is just another traveller by the wayside in this picture, which is hardly an exalted role. Yet Ephraem is willing to state the matter even more boldly than that:²⁷

ܠܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ
ܠܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ ܠܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ
ܠܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ ܠܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ

"Because we had likened ourselves to wild animals, God came down and likened Himself to us so that He might make us again like Him".

This is shocking. We are like beasts and He becomes like us: what more extravagant claim can be made about the Incarnation?

Ephraem calls the Son ܠܡܢ 'dead'²⁸, yet hedges his bets elsewhere²⁹ by calling the body of Christ ܡܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܐ

26. H. 24.10

27. H. 37.2.1-3

28. H 4.8.9

29. H 63.3.2

'the body of His human nature'. He thus pushes human experience closer to the Son and pulls it away from Him because of the chasm between the two natures. The first expresses the reality of the incarnate Christ as it appeared to humans and the second expresses the reality of the Son as He is in Himself. Ephraem means both of these statements to be taken seriously, but one is a recognition of obvious fact and the other an attempt to communicate an ineffable truth.

Ephraem is willing to liken the effect of the Incarnation on the Son to that greatest of all disasters of human history: the Fall,³⁰ and yet will not allow any comparison at all between Adam (considered only in his nature, not his terrible disobedience) and the Son.³¹ He will call human beings 'brothers' of Christ³², but will also say that the *incarnate* Son is unlike us as well as like us. There is no willingness at all in him to allow the Incarnation to shake his protection of the Son's dignity of nature. This is shown clearly in that the importance of the intra-Trinitarian aspect for his reflection on the Son outweighs all Ephraem's other difficulties in expressing his idea of the Christ of the gospels. In fact, it leads him to call the Incarnation the work of the Father rather than of the Son³³. When Ephraem consider the Son, even at His most involved with the creation, he sees a Person of the Trinity. His thought always begins with that.

There are many paradoxes in any Christology, all of them needing balance, and each individual balancing effort makes all the other necessary balancings more precarious. Ephraem's ability to meet this challenge is highly developed and, even within this small part of his work, carefully nuanced. That he realizes the existence of paradoxes involved in describing the relations from the Son 'up' to the Father as well as 'down' to His humanity and, even farther 'down', to His relations with humankind as a whole, is proof that Ephraem is aware of all the normal conceptual bounds which the Christian proclamation tramples and is attempting a coherent picture despite all these difficult elements.

30. H 35.6.5-8

31. H 8.6.10-11

32. H 82.5.1-2

33. H 41.6

Ephraem's Christology is mature. It is formed in full awareness of the difficulties involved and attempts to meet them in a manner satisfying to its author.

All the foregoing examination of Ephraem's teaching on Christ is a prelude to a discussion of his understanding of how this effects the Atonement. It is the result of Christology that is the Christian proclamation, after all, not the Christology itself.

The fruits of the Incarnation are many for the human race, in Ephraem's eyes, and they offer a salvation which is accomplished and made evident on many different levels.

Before we look at the results of the Incarnation we should see what the Son can offer us apart from this. After all, there was human existence and worship of the true God in the midst of the wandering astray depicted in the Old Testament. These goods must have some acknowledgement in any considered doctrine of salvation since they form the evidence for an earlier offer of blessing from God.

Ephraem credits the Son with the maintenance of an ontological link across the chasm separating the divine from its creation¹.
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 "All creatures depend on Him because He is mingled with His begetter". The Son is shown to be not only the creator and God of the creation, but its sustainer as well, even before the Incarnation. Ephraem wishes it to be quite clear that only the Son, whether incarnate or not, performs this function of linking the Godhead to its creatures. Just as the Son is the sustainer of creation, so is the incarnate Son the only source of our knowledge of God². The Incarnation has enabled the Son to perform this additional service for us. Indeed, it has greatly increased the Son's ability to help us make use of our free will because it has made Him able to give us something to engage our minds³. So we see that the Incarnation has enhanced even the relations between creation and God which existed before it took place.

1. S 1.69-70

2. H 48.1.1-4

3. In H 53.12.4-6. Ephraem says that both Father and Son are hidden from all. Thus only the incarnate Son is able to reveal Himself and the other

can be salvific in itself. It must refer both to the corporate life of the Church in the Eucharist and the private life of piety (or, one supposes, the case of a believer in time of persecution). Confession of faith makes the believer take on the true bread in the Eucharist but also allows him to be nourished by Christ outside that particular situation too, since there seems no reason to limit its provenance only to the most obvious of its meanings. This second is important. Right confession can be our true bread as can the Eucharist. We can enjoy the benefits of the sacramental presence of Christ through right belief.

The understanding of the Son offered by the Incarnation is one of its specific benefits in the mind of Ephraem.⁶

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"He gave us His names and He took names from us. His names made us greater and [our] names made Him smaller."

Because we are able to comprehend the names proper to us, the Son has moved within the field of our understanding in His taking of our names through the Incarnation. This is not only occurring on the intellectual level, however, for Ephraem elsewhere makes absolutely clear that he does not mean to portray an exchange of terms without an exchange of the realities they represent.⁷

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6. H 5.7.5-9 Murray (1975) p. 11 describes this as God's moving between the apophatic and cataphatic poles.

7. H 77.23-25

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"The fruit [Son] came down and put on a body, and with it He put on the feeble names of the sons of its race. Just as He put on our human nature so did He also put on our [limited] knowledge for our sake. The one who knows everything became one who did not know. He would ask and listen [to the answer] as a human [would] for the sake of the human being."

The taking on of the names is the taking on of the reality. The Incarnation and our ability to understand it are linked closely enough in Ephraem's mind to result in a picture of an act of the divine which carries its own explanation with it. Ephraem is strict in avoiding any idea that the use of the same terms to refer to both Christ and us means that there is an equivalence between us,⁸ though he says that there are those who would approve of such an equation.⁹ The connection between Christ and us is on the intellectual level and *not* on that of ontological status.

More than our minds are involved here. Our wills are engaged in the process of salvation too.¹⁰

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8. H 63.9

9. One presumes that he refers to Arian attempts to paint Christ as less-than-fully divine, which he would understand as placing Christ in the created realm along with us.

10. H 31.5.1-4

the Godhead would be incomplete without all three and denies the Arians' "There was a time when He was not," with a straight counter statement.

Ephraem declares the mingling and distinction of Father and Son back and forth in the same passage. The serial insistence on these separate facts is meant to create a sense of balance between them which eludes more exact formulation. Ephraem also stresses that the perfection of each of the two Persons exists within that Person alone and is not dependent on the other. This is meant to avoid a misreading which would take his emphasis on the interaction of the two as meaning that they were parts of a whole and so only complete in their union with each other. The insistence on each Person's own perfection is a means of guarding the eternal existence of both Father and Son because it does not allow them to be seen as elements in a larger perfection. Gregory does not offer any similar passage. Ephraem also counters the "There was a time when He was not," with a direct denial.

Gregory insists on a strong identity of subject between the Son and the incarnate Christ,¹³ going so far, in his desire to make them known as the same individual, as to be willing to call the exalted Christ a human being.¹⁴ This does not mean that he neglects the existence of Christ's human nature, however. He assigns the acts and attributes of Christ to each of the two natures as seems appropriate,¹⁵ hoping in this way to provide a coherent reading of the gospels which does not require the regarding of Christ's divinity.

Ephraem also displays a strong sense of the identity of Son and incarnate Christ and accepts gladly all the paradoxes this brings in its wake.¹⁶ Indeed, he even says outright¹⁷ that

13. Or. 29.19

14. Or. 30.14

15. Or. 30.15

16. H 29.3.7-8, e.g., This passage depicts the Son as remaining the sustainer of creation throughout the Incarnation, in the manner Cyril of Alexandria would later make so renowned, e. g. in his *Third Letter to Nestorius* section 3.

17. H. 6.12

Christ presents a very great difficulty of classification because of His dual nature.¹⁸

Ephraem insists strongly on the reality of the Incarnation and on its limiting of the Son,¹⁹ while also attributing the human qualities to the human 'body' ܕܝܫܬܐ which is the equivalent of the custom of attributing them to the 'sarx' of Christ, well known among the Greeks. Ephraem's declaration that the Son is not impoverished in His essence by the Incarnation²⁰ is another way of emphasizing the identity of the subject and the dual attribution of christological texts. Again he is expressing divergent truths in serial fashion in an attempt to achieve balance between them. His use of 'dead' ܕܡܝܬ of the Son is a striking example of an attempt to express this inexpressible central truth in one statement rather than two.

Gregory declares that purpose of the Incarnation was the working out of our salvation.²¹ Christ represents our nature and saves us through His sufferings. Gregory also holds that the Incarnation bridges the gulf between creature and creator to make theology possible.

Ephraem expresses our salvation through the Incarnation as being worked out through the exchange of names attendant on the Son's appropriation of our nature. Ephraem stresses the involvement of our intellectual and moral capacities in this process too, claiming that our wills figure in our salvation and stating that right confession brings blessing in its wake. He is, nevertheless, insistent that we are not responsible for our own salvation but are, rather, saved by God.

The similarity between these two Pictures are very deep and broad. They have differences of emphasis which have been noted, but seem clearly to be of the same theological convictions in the face of the same theological opponents.

18. It is interesting that both of the writers count on the identity of subject to hold Christ together as an individual despite their willingness to read christological verses of Scripture in a dual manner. The unity of the one is the remedy for the duality of the other position and between the two they hope to treat all the different aspects of the reality of Christ.

19. H 28.6.3-7

20. H 32.13-14

21. Or. 30.3

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

A review of the similarities and differences between the two authors treated in this study will aid in the assessment of the aspects of their thought which have been addressed.

The first chapter revealed their common concern to limit the expectations placed upon theological effort. They both offer the incompleteness of human knowledge of the created order as a support for their contention that it is impossible for humans to know God fully, as Beck points out.²² Both Gregory and Ephraem grant the possibility of real success in theology if, as they both stress, it is undertaken properly with a proper attitude. Their confidence in the prospect of coming to know God better is balanced by a realization that this is only possible under certain conditions. They share the conviction that the Arian efforts at theology will not prosper because they are undertaken with the wrong attitude, one manifestation of which is their overconfidence about the level of success humans can attain in knowing God.

The second chapter showed a number of points of likeness in their use of Scripture in theological discourse against their Arian opponents. They both read Scripture in a detailed manner, at times relying on an analysis of grammar to draw out its meaning. At other times, they advocate allowing the majority view or main trend of Scripture, its *skopos*, to outweigh any particular peculiarities that might occur in isolated verses or passages. This juxtaposition of different principles means that the successful exegete, in both Gregory's and Ephraem's minds, must balance different techniques and know *when* to use each one as well as *how* to use each one properly.

Both Gregory and Ephraem use the technique of attributing different christological verses in Scripture to the different natures of Christ. This allows them to claim all the usual christological verses as true and apt without their being forced to denigrate the divine nature or compromise the full reality of the human.

22. Beck (1981) p. 25

Both authors teach that there is progress in revelation for Gregory it is in the revelation of the Trinity from the Old Testament to the New Testament to the life of the Church, for Ephraem it is in the passing away of some parts of the Revelation to be replaced by later ones as the human situation changes. These are both meant as blows against the Arians' univalent reading of all verses of Scripture without a feel for the whole revelation as a backdrop and setting to the individual verses.

The contrast between Arian efforts to read Scripture 'atomically' and Nicene efforts to accept the importance of traditional understandings of Scripture and to read the difficult verses in the light of those more easily understood is clearly reflected in the work of both writers.

There is a distinct difference, seen in Chapter III, in the way in which these two authors make use of Scripture in their works. Gregory tends to use many more overt citations than Ephraem and to build them up in lists for greater effect. When making an assertion about the teaching of Scripture on a particular point, Gregory seems to feel that the more overwhelming his battery of verses the stronger his case will be. It was also seen quite clearly that Gregory may have adopted this tactic because he was arguing against various *catenae* of scriptural texts collected by the Arians to buttress their arguments. By striking against these collections of support in the two most obvious ways: the first being to argue against their validity by putting forward a contrary system of scriptural understanding, an example of which is the system of dual attribution, the second being to collect even longer strings of supporting quotations than the Arians have, Gregory attempts to take away from these Arian *catenae* their power to convince. Ephraem, on the other hand, makes very sparing use of quotations from Scripture in the course of his arguments. Because he does, on occasion, choose to offer a citation of Scripture to clinch a point, it is clear that Ephraem is able to use this tool if he chooses. Why, then, is it so much rarer than in Gregory's writings? The likeliest answer is that the literary genres he had chosen to use to convey his thoughts were not as amenable to this sort of arguing as Gregory's more adversarial orations. The association

of the oration with politics and the law courts gave it a harder edge and brought out different expectations in the listeners than did the hymns and metrical homilies of the Syrian church. This use of Scripture in argument seems a point at which the expectations of their audiences caused these writers to diverge in their approaches to their task.

Chapter IV sees Gregory arguing strenuously that the Arians try to make language bear too heavy a burden when they expect it to be able to describe God as He is. At the same time, because of their desire to read certain verses of Scripture in an allegorical manner as homonymic uses of words, the Arians also, in Gregory's opinion, grant too little importance to the power of language to convey meaning. Their over-estimation of the virtue of their own linguistic formulations and their under-estimation of the language of Scripture leads Gregory to find them at fault on both ends of this same scale. Ephraem also complains of the collapse of meaning in theological discourse. He considers the information carried by Scripture to be reasonable and normative for theologians. Ephraem does not keep his own theological vocabulary within the bounds of the words used in Scripture or expect that his opponents will. He does argue, however, for the necessity of remaining within the bounds of the *message* of Scripture.

Chapter V showed much similarity between their theological methods. Their use of logical arguments, their concerns with the use and range of validity of similes, their use of our lack of full knowledge of the created order as a paradigm for our lack of full knowledge of God, and their shared insistence on the human inability to comprehend the divine give them a broad base of shared, central arguments from which to assail the Arian positions. It was interesting to see that, in the selection of his works, at least, Ephraem did not choose to argue from the tradition of Christian worship, though Gregory did. The reason for that difference is, at present, unknown to us.

Chapter VI showed much common ground in their christological positions as well. Gregory insisted on the equality of all three Persons in the Trinity and claimed that their full divinity stands or falls together. Ephraem attempts to intertwine

his descriptions of the divine nature of the Father and the Son, joining these in such a way that the description of each serves as a backdrop to the description of the other. Is this not a different form of the same joint teaching that Gregory employs? Both of these writers insist on a strong identification of the incarnate Christ with the Word as a Person in the Godhead, thus supporting the full divinity of Jesus in the gospels. The paradoxes inherent in this divine Word's enfleshment with a human body they try to make acceptable by the system of the dual attribution of christological verses of Scripture to these two natures in Christ. This supports their picture of Christ by drawing support from Scripture in the same manner for both the natures of Christ. The identical nature of their exegetical method with regard to both natures in Christ, as opposed to the Arians' practice of depending on homonyms for their exegesis in support of their less-than-fully-divine 'divine nature, in Christ, is most likely intended to add credibility to their picture. The paradox with each side expressed in parallel with its opposite is, perhaps, more convincing than the paradox which depends on the one side on strict literal reading of the Scripture and on the other on the use of homonyms to explain away vocabulary that is awkward to one's case. The attaching of the working out of salvation to their understanding of the Incarnation is another attempt to make disagreement with them seem perilous. In this instance these two writers appear to appeal over the heads of their opponents to their common audience to garner the audience's support for what they claim is the sure road to salvation. This is certainly the most populist element in their common teaching.

This study has demonstrated clearly that these two authors, despite their different milieux and educational backgrounds, reacted to the Arian theological argument in very much the same way. Within the constraints of their own cultures and guided as well by the expectations of their audiences, they nevertheless met the Arian challenge at the same points and offered the same rebuttals in the majority of cases. Their shared concerns over the proper use of language for theological reasoning, the need to treat Scripture as a coherent whole and yet to treat its language with close attention to detail, their use of double attribution to render christological verses of Scripture comprehensible, and their

conviction that only theology undertaken with the proper attitude can be successful, all combine to present a picture of two writers with shared concerns.

The most striking difference we have perceived is between Gregory's greater willingness to confront his adversaries through the quotation of Scripture or by directly citing their teachings to refute them and Ephraem's much less frequent explicit references to the specifics of his opponents' teachings and his less frequent direct repudiations of their ideas. We have previously mentioned the difference in their genres of literature or in the expectations of their audiences as being the possible source of this divergence. This seems to be the most likely solution to a problem not easily subjected to scientific investigation.²³

In conclusion, it must be said that the coherence of the positions put forward by these two authors, despite the difference in the arenas in which they toiled and the audiences they sought to convince, is broad enough to leave the attentive reader with the conviction that they saw in their Arians opponents much the same menace and sought to counter that menace with much the same weapons. The two writers under study here were comrades in arms without ever being aware of each other's efforts.

23. We should also note in passing that some scholars have put forward model of the development of the thought of the early Church that would seem to be applicable to this sort of divergence. Markus (1980) mentions two different sorts of Christian self-understanding that he sees as ascendant one after the other in the early Church: the first is one that depends for its criterion of Judgement as to what is acceptable teaching on a decision about where the true Church is located, Markus (1980) p. 5, and the second is one which defines unacceptable teaching by juxtaposing it with acceptable teaching, Markus (1980) pp. 10-11. If this paradigm can be made to fit the two authors under study, we would place Ephraem in the category of the writer concerned with where the true Church is located and Gregory in that of the person concerned with drawing distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable teaching. Thus would Ephraem be mostly concerned with what he considers the signs of the true Church: proper attitude towards God, proper worship, acceptance of the primacy of Scripture and its help in grasping divine truths communicated in the world around us, while Gregory would be set on determining the content of his opponents' teaching and then rigorously comparing it with what he considers acceptable. The authors do tend to make different impressions on their readers that could be fitted into Markus' two categories. There is a potential difficulty, however. Markus, (1980) p. 10, makes one of the

characteristics of his first stage a willingness to accept variant teachings within the Church so long as the criteria for the presence of the true Church are met. Ephraem does not seem to be willing to do that. If we recall that Ephraem was a member of a small and beleaguered group in his own city and spent much of his writing life composing works against those he considered to be heretics of various sorts: *Prose Refutations of Mani Marcion and Bardaisan*, and *Hymns against Heresies* as well as the two sets under study here, it seems more difficult to class him with this group. Besides there is no question that Ephraem is willing to counter the positions of the Arians with great sharpness when he thinks it is wise to do so. His direct denial of the central Arian premise by counter-statement is sufficient evidence of this. One could say that Ephraem was standing on the cusp of the line separating the two categories and so was, as it were, expressing the concerns of the second and later group Markus discerns in the idiom of the earlier, first group. This would leave us with not much more than our original observation that Ephraem's writings display a very different atmosphere from these orations of Gregory. Since it seems a rational principle to avoid unnecessary complications in making educated guesses, I think it best to hold to the suggestion that Ephraem writes for a different audience with a different set of expectations for what sort of discourse should accompany their worship. With that we will rest content at present.

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